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GRANTLEY MANOR.

A TALE.

BY

LADY GEORGIANA FULLERTON.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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GRANTLEY MANOR.

CHAPTER I.

On board the vessel which was carrying him from England to Ireland Edmund Neville stood, and as it approached the port where he was to land, he gazed on the fanciful forms of the clouds which were gathering round the sinking sun, and then on the light waves that were breaking quietly on the shore, and the repose of nature seemed in strange disaccordance with the feelings of his own breast. There was not a single point in the past or in the future on which his mind could rest with any sense of repose, and he looked forward with painful uneasiness to his arrival at Clantoy, and to the questions which might be put to him in consequence of the reports to which his sister alluded. *If the truth* had been rumoured abroad in some unaccountable manner, and had reached the ears of his family, what would be the result? A sickening doubt *of his own rectitude* crept over him. If everything

should be at stake, and ruin stare him in the face, what should he do? What was there in himself, what steady principle, or what noble impulse, to set against the temptation of denying his marriage, of staining his honour with a falsehood? He searched his own heart he questioned his own spirit; he weighed them in the balance, and found them wanting. Not even his affection could stand against the opposing force of selfish interest, and there was not one grain of principle to throw into the scale. It is a bitter thing to commune with one's own secret soul, and turn from it with contempt, — to see the stormy passions that swell about the heart, lulled into repose in some hour of solitary thought, — and then, through the still waters, to gaze into the depths of the abyss, and see the reflection of our own deadly selfishness. When, on landing at Belfast, Edmund threw himself into the carriage-and-four which was waiting for him, the rapid motion and the nearer approach to the scene of contest and struggle which he was anticipating, renewed the agitation of his spirits, and over and over again he rehearsed a series of stormy discussions, of charges repulsed, of questions evaded, of menaces resisted, of resolutions taken, and strong will pitched against strong will in

fierce and close encounter. Although the night was cold, he was in such a state of feverish excitement, that the wind that blew from the sea as he travelled along the coast was only refreshing to him, and the horses that were going at the rate of ten miles an hour seemed to him to linger on the road. As he was stopping to change horses at a little inn about seven miles from Clantoy, a man on horseback approached the carriage, and he recognised the voice of his cousin Charles Neville, a young clergyman whose living was within a few miles of Clantoy, but whom he had not seen during his last visit to Ireland.

"May I come into the carriage, Edmund? I must speak to you," he said in a hurried manner, and the step was let down, and as he jumped in, he was heard to desire the post-boy to go on as fast as possible. His hand, when he pressed Edmund's, shook, and he could at first scarcely find voice to speak to him; but the words came at last, and suddenly and fearfully did they turn the current of excited feeling which was swelling in his companion's breast. That will which he had come to withstand, that iron resolution which had stood between him and his object, that violence he had meant to oppose by equal violence, or to deceive by ingenious

evasions, was powerless, subdued, and silenced for ever by one mightier than itself. A rapid illness had carried off Mr. Neville after twenty-four hours of suffering, and twenty-four subsequent ones of sensible and rapidly-increasing exhaustion, and the messenger who had been sent to summon his son to Clantoy had missed him on the road. A cry of bitter anguish — a groan of horror — burst from the heaving breast of the startled and bewildered Edmund: he grasped convulsively Charles Neville's hand, and neither spoke nor moved, and scarcely thought during that hour's journey. He felt as if in a dream, so sudden had been the revolution in his state of mind; there was a sensation of weight on his breast, with a sharp pang of self-reproach, and then vague suggestions of selfish anxiety, dimly flitting like shadows in the mental vision, and driven away from the soul and brain by the force of present anguish and remorseful terror. Through the scenes which awaited him, in the desolation of that home, in the midst of the affliction which he witnessed and shared, still that state of feeling pursued him, only that on the canvas of that present affliction, more and more distinctly rose the personal fears, and hopes, and solicitudes which now thrust themselves forward with resistless

prominence. In his sister's manner, usually so calm even in hours of strong emotion, there was a degree of restless perturbation which struck him peculiarly. She did not seem absorbed in her affliction, as his mother was, though the expression of her countenance indicated much suffering, and her bursts of sorrow occasionally revealed how deeply she mourned; but her mind seemed intent on something besides her grief, and her eyes were so frequently fixed upon her brother with a kind of anxious scrutiny, that he would sometimes leave the room to avoid that silent investigation. He knew that she had been for some months past engaged to marry Charles Neville, and he felt a sort of impatient astonishment at the way in which he himself seemed to be a greater object of interest to her than her future husband, and at the pertinacious manner in which she sought his society, and, as he thought, endeavoured to insinuate herself into his confidence. As the moment approached when the will on which his whole fate depended was to be opened, his nervous irritation increased to such a degree that he could hardly remain in the house, and wandered for hours on the banks of the lake, or across the adjoining moors. Sometimes he felt an impulse to question Anne on the subject of

his father's last impressions regarding his marriage, and on the nature of the report which she had spoken of in her own letter; but the very solicitude with which she seemed to seize on any opening that led to this subject, gave him a misgiving, and deepened his reserve. When he spoke of the future, and alluded to any plan connected with his taking possession of the estates, a cloud passed over her face; and he had once seen her glance at Charles Neville with an indefinable expression, which so haunted him on the following night, that he was on the point of seeking her room, waking her out of her sleep, and calling upon her to give up her secret thoughts, and relieve him, if she could, from the weight of intolerable suspense. But his pride forbade it; he could not easily suspect the sister whose kindness and affection he had never doubted, and of whose high principles and disinterestedness he had seen many proofs, of any selfish or mercenary thoughts; but still he could not endure to humble himself before her by betraying his own, and whenever she seemed disposed to lead to the subject, he shut himself up in silence and reserve. The day came at last on which Mr. Neville's will was to be opened and read in the presence of the connexions of the family, and the

lawyers appointed for the purpose. Edmund was perfectly calm — he had mastered his anxiety, at least to outward appearance, and with his hands crossed on his chest, and his eyes fixed on the ground, he listened to the instrument which was to decide his fate, without moving a muscle, or giving any other sign of interest than a respectful attention. Pride and a sense of the importance of self-command at that instant gave him strength for the occasion; but his heart was beating a hundred to the minute, and when the preliminary sentences had been read, and through the legal technicalities that preceded it the real import of the will became apparent, a feeling of faintness came over him, which was combated by an effort that seemed almost to stop his respiration. Everything that for years had been possessed by his family, the townlands of Clantoy and Eskerreen, in Ireland, with their rent-rolls of ten and twenty thousand a year; Darrell Court and its dependencies, in the county of —, in England; a small estate in Scotland; a house in Cavendish-square, in London; and other minor bequests accompanying these, were successively and pompously enumerated, and all were left to him to hold and to keep at his pleasure, and to descend to his children after him, under proviso and

condition that if he remained unmarried or died without heirs, the said estates and properties, &c., should devolve to Anne Neville, his sister, and to her heirs after her; or in the event of his marrying or declaring a marriage with a person professing the Roman Catholic religion, that he should at once forfeit the possession of the said estates, properties, &c., and that they should at such time pass into the hands of the said Anne Neville, or her life failing, to her children after her, or her heirs failing, to Charles Neville, of —, and to his heirs after him. It is said that when a sentence of death is pronounced upon a man, he is neither as much agitated or as much shocked, as the spectators of his trial. The fact is, that he scarcely realises its meaning, nor can he present to his own mind its full bearing. In the same way, what Edmund Neville had so much dreaded, that his days had been restless and his nights sleepless, had now come upon him, and he scarcely felt more agitated when he left, than when he had entered the room an hour before. He had not raised his eyes once during the time which it had taken to read the will; and when an old squire who was distantly related to him shook hands with him, as they passed through the hall into the drawing-room, and whispered,

—"Aye, a chip of the old block. A Protestant to the back-bone. No Popish wife, hey?" the blood which rushed to his heart, did not even tinge his cheek. That evening, one of the lawyers who had been present observed to the clergyman at whose house he drank tea, that it was easy to see by Mr. Charles Neville's varying colour, and the attention with which he watched his cousin, and the way he fidgeted in his chair, that the purport of the will was not a matter of indifference to him; and he added, that Mr. Edmund Neville seemed so very unconcerned in the minor details, and so absorbed in his own thoughts, that he was evidently well satisfied, and not at all surprised at its provisions.

When Edmund had watched the last person leave the house, and stood alone opposite to the blazing fire in the old-fashioned saloon, he leant his head against the chimney, and gazed on the curling and sparking flame with a dull sense of misery, which seemed gradually to invade and take possession of his mind. He felt, at that moment, utterly incapable of defining clearly to himself his own position, and still more of adopting at once the only honourable course he could now pursue; on the contrary, he saw no safety but in a desperate effort to conceal his marriage, at least, till

he had time to consider fully all the bearings of the subject, and employed every means, and used every effort, by prayers, by threats, by all the powers which her youth and love had placed in his hands, to persuade or to compel Ginevra to renounce her religion. This was the tacit purpose of his mind, the single ray of hope that crossed it. Her unbounded devotion to himself, her implicit submission to his will on all points but the one on which he had hitherto found her intractable, seemed to afford a chance of eventual success, or at least grounds of security against any immediate disclosure on her part of the secret ties that bound them, which delay would give him time to work effectually on her fears and on her hopes. Drops of cold sweat started to his brow as he thought of the consequences of a sudden emotion, an unguarded expression on her part. By a strange process of self-deception, his own assumption of a fortune and a position which he had in reality forfeited, and which he could only retain by a dishonourable silence, appeared to him in the light of a justifiable resistance to a revolting injustice, and to defeat its object by every means in his power, a simple act of self-defence; and yet, by an equally strange incon-

sistency, he felt it absolutely necessary to guard against any circumstances that might open Ginevra's eyes, and awaken scruples, which, once aroused, would baffle all his sophistry, and enlist against him the uncompromising rectitude of her character. He instinctively felt this, and writhed under the consciousness. In the whole range of human suffering, there is not perhaps a more irritating description of feeling than that experienced by a wholly undisciplined spirit, in its unavailing struggle against the force of circumstances too powerful to be controlled, and too galling to be endured. Edmund's worst enemy might have pitied him in that hour, for he was not only smarting under disappointment, harassed with anxiety, and leaning for support on a single hope, which had already been repeatedly deceived, and to which he clung with the desperate tenacity of a drowning man; but he was also parting at that moment with his own illusions about himself. Life was tearing from him that fictitious character which had so long, even in his own eyes, hung about him and flattered him into self-complacency. Henceforth his admiration of what was good and great would be a mockery of his own course. The generous impulses that all, even the most hardened, experience

at times, would re-act on his own soul like the impotent efforts that are made in a dream, and Ginevra would be no more to him like a ministering angel at his side, but as an angel standing at the entrance of an earthly paradise, and forbidding him to enter. It was not that he formed at that time any deliberate project of retaining in the end, and under false pretences, a fortune which now legally devolved on his sister. He had a vain feeling that if Ginevra ultimately refused to give way in the trial of strength which was about to be engaged between his passions and her principles, the whole must be surrendered; but he clung to that hope with a tenacity which blinded him to all ulterior consequences, and made him reckless of all future embarrassments. Unable himself to conceive the nature or intensity of her religious convictions, he considered the whole question as one of personal influence, and it was on the strength or the weakness of her affections that he alternately reckoned with exultation or looked with apprehension. This added a fresh source of torment and disquietude to his already sufficiently trying situation, for he passionately loved his wife, and persuaded himself that if she finally withstood his threa

and his entreaties, that it would be a proof of coldness of heart or of indifference to himself.

At that moment a deep sigh startled him from his reverie, and turning round he saw his sister seated in a chair close to him, and watching him, as usual, with an anxious expression.

"For Heaven's sake, Anne!" he exclaimed, in a hurried manner, "do not follow me about the house in that silent manner, and with that mournful countenance. I wish to be alone, and —"

"Edmund," she interrupted gently, "do not send me away so unkindly? Brother, dear brother!"

She laid her head on his shoulder and burst into tears; but quickly recovering herself, she continued —

"I have suffered much lately, or I should not be so weak; but, Edmund, I *must* speak to you — I must implore you to have patience with me."

"Is there anything in which I can serve you, Anne? If there is, mention it at once. There is nothing I would not do for you or for my mother."

"No, Edmund, it is of yourself I would speak, and —"

"Then I beg that you will be silent."

"It is for your sake I would speak," she said

firmly, and recovering her self-possession. "Believe me, that truth and openness, and an honest purpose, would serve your interests far better than —," she seemed to hesitate as to the word to be used, "than reserve."

"I do not understand you," he replied, in a cold and haughty manner.

"Cannot you understand me?" she continued, without looking at him; "if you really do not, then I thank God for it. If henceforward your course is simple and clear, and there is no struggle in your breast, though suffering there may be, — if no irrevocable step has been taken —"

He turned fiercely round, and this time his face could not conceal the horrible agitation of his soul; and if she had raised her eyes, she must have perceived it, but they were fixed on the fire, and she continued —

"If you can assume your present position with an approving conscience —"

"Anne," he vehemently exclaimed; "Anne, I have no patience for such language as this; and if ever you venture to speak to me again in this manner, it will be the signal of an eternal separation between us. I am

sorry for your disappointment," he added, with a bitter sneer; "you had, no doubt, intended to gratify Charles Neville with the first intelligence of his future prospects, and with the success of this, your *sisterly* mission; but I am obliged to deceive your hopes, and to baffle your generous intentions in my favour and in his."

This implied accusation restored at once to Anne Neville her ordinary self-possession. She became as calm as contempt can make one, and gazed on her brother with a feeling of pity that took from her all angry emotion. She answered coldly —

"I care not to repel a charge which is either an ebullition of temper worthy of a froward child, or a proof that you are utterly incapable of appreciating the character or the feelings which an experience of more than twenty years, which the remembrances of childhood, and the intercourse of maturer years, might have made you acquainted with. That you have thrown a bitter ingredient into my present cup of sorrow, and effaced, as by one stroke, the sweet confidence of affection which once existed between us, may one day cause you regret, and if ever — do not go till I have said this, for I *must* say it, and then set you at liberty from my presence — if ever you should feel that the burthen of

a secret trial, or an overpowering difficulty, or the reproaches of your conscience meet you at every turn in your life and cause you intolerable suffering, then think of me, and of my words. Perhaps your own heart will have whispered to you in the meantime, that mine was not one likely to be swayed by a mean and disgraceful selfishness."

As she left the room without offering him her hand, or even looking at him, Edmund's heart sunk within him. For one moment he thought of calling her back, of throwing himself into her arms, of opening his whole heart to her, and a dim and distant vision of an honourable life of exertion and of sacrifice, begun in principle and ending in honour, floated before him. Perhaps Anne might never marry, and devote herself to him and his, and they might all live together, and then her influence over his wife might in the end be successful, and work conviction where persuasion and violence had failed. His heart seemed to soften and expand with this idea, and he moved towards the door with slow and irresolute steps; as he crossed the hall he looked up and saw Anne walking up and down the gallery, and speaking in a low voice, but in an earnest manner, to Charles Neville, whose arm was round her

waist. His dream vanished, his suspicions returned, his heart hardened again, and the practical details of business, and petty exercises of authority in which he was soon involved, riveted with a thousand links the chains which fettered him to the course he had taken. He had not written to Ginevra since his departure from Grantley Manor, and now the moment was come when he must address to her the first intelligence of the fatal complication in which they were involved. It would have been natural that in a moment of such importance to the whole of their future lives, and of such keen suffering to himself, he should have disclosed to her without restraint or concealment, the exact nature of the difficulties in which he found himself so unexpectedly entangled; but, in the first place, there did not exist between them those habits of confidential intercourse which, under ordinary circumstances, spring up by a kind of moral necessity between husband and wife. The romantic and painful secrecy which had attended their married life, had established between them a strange reserve which had gradually deepened in proportion as time elapsed and their trials increased. The short moments of intercourse which were allowed them, were spent in conflicts of feeling and scenes of emotion

which carried them beyond the sphere of every-day life; while her youth, her inexperience, and her difficult position made her reluctant to press upon him questions which always appeared to embarrass him, and which he generally evaded with a gloomy countenance, or attempted to parry by evasive replies. In the present instance, he felt it more absolutely necessary than ever to keep her in ignorance of the exact nature of the circumstances under which he was acting; so strong was his conviction, that with all her gentleness and ignorance, there was that in her character which, if once the case was fairly put before her, would overpower all his sophistry and break through the restraints she had hitherto submitted to. The time was therefore come, when truth and falsehood, love and fear, were to wield their keenest weapons, their most powerful engines. His heart smote him as he wrote the warrant that was to commit her to fresh sufferings, to prolonged trials; his hand trembled and tears started to his eyes; but the courage of selfishness is great, and he subdued his better feelings with the steady resolution with which some war against their bad passions, — or perhaps he persuaded himself that it was for her sake as well as his own that he must urge upon her ac-

ceptance, and even compel her to agree to, the only course that would place her as well as himself, in a position such as it would be his pride and his happiness to behold her occupy.

Grantley Manor had been very gay that week; so it was reported among the neighbours, so it was recorded in the county newspaper. There had been one night a ball, and dancing had been kept up till daybreak; another night charades had been acted, and the lovely daughters of the hospitable owner (so the article went) had enchanted a select audience with their various talents for music, for acting, and for scenic pantomime, in which graceful amusements they had been joined by the amiable daughters of the Earl of Donnington, and all the fashionable young men in the neighbourhood. The first check which the amusements of the assembled party had experienced was by the sudden departure of Mr. and Mrs. Warren, occasioned by the unexpected announcement of Mr. Neville's death. It was on the morning after the ball that he drew Ginevra aside, and communicated to her the intelligence which was likely to tell so decisively on her future destiny. Shocked and agitated, she remained silent, and saw him depart without venturing to ask the question which was trem-

bling on her lips, but that seemed to choke her in t utterance, "Would this event remove or lighten t difficulties in Edmund's path?

The days of suspense that followed were almo insupportable, and it required all the energy of Gir vra's singular character to command the agitation her spirits, and the intensity of her anxiety. But sir the scene with her sister, which had seemed to oper new state of things between them, she had a power stimulus to action, which roused all the capabilities her nature. That sister's happiness became an obj of passionate solicitude, and she watched every turn her countenance, and every inflexion of her voice, the merchant whose all is at the mercy of the wi and the waves, watches the clouds that gather in t distance, or the gusts that career over the ocean. to herself, she could not fathom the extent of the tri that awaited her; but with a patient recklessness s lived on from day to day, like one who follows t narrow path with a precipice on either side, and nev suffers his eye to rest, but on the next step he is abo to take. The music that resounded in her ears, t scenes she was required to act, the songs which we allotted to her, and the applause which followed ea

exertion of her talents, seemed all a part of the pageant of life, and beneath it rolled a deep and ever-increasing sense of misery, which was stemmed and repressed by an ever-increasing strength; and sometimes, when her eye rested on Margaret, and a bright smile glanced across a face which seemed made for smiles, or when, in the might of her own inspiration, she imparted to her a spark of that fire which fed her own genius, and saw others gaze with admiration at the beautiful countenance of her sister, when, lighted up by a sympathetic excitement, a sensation of pleasure stole over her own heart, and re-acted on her own spirits. And Margaret was watching too — darkly and heavily had weighed on her soul the suspicions, the evidence, of that fatal night — and wild was the tumult of emotion that followed it.

When Ginevra had left the room with Mr. Warren on the morning so often alluded to, she sat drawing with a feverish application, and an aching, throbbing sensation in her breast; she could not analyse her own feelings, or form any plan of conduct for the future; and to all Maud Vincent's playful inquiries, or serious remarks, she could oppose nothing but a gloomy silence.

Maud, whose temper was good, though sharp, and who really felt for her, at last gave up the attempt in despair, and hastily seizing on a portfolio of drawings which Margaret had laid on the table, she began to turn them over with a careless impatience. One of them seemed to draw her notice more than the rest, and she held it up to the light and examined it with attention.

"Who drew this likeness of Ginevra?" she asked at last.

"What do you mean? There is no likeness of her that I know of," answered Margaret peevishly, for she felt provoked at the pertinacious manner in which Maud seemed to harp on that now acutely painful subject.

"Why, if that is not a likeness, I do not know what is!" she exclaimed, and threw the drawing before Margaret's eyes.

The resemblance was so striking, that no one could deny it; and at first Margaret looked at the sketch with a sort of vague bewilderment; but in another instar a whole chain of recollections flashed on her mind it was her own drawing, corrected and altered by F mund Neville on the evening after Ginevra's approa arrival had been made known at Grantley. Q

lightning her thoughts flew back to that period, and recalled to her a number of circumstances bearing upon this one. She could not take her eyes off the paper, and unused to command her agitation, she betrayed it so visibly, that Maud exclaimed —

"Why, my dear girl, what is it makes you turn scarlet, and look as if you were going to cry? I am very unlucky in my remarks this morning. Every minute I get into some scrape or other. Is it the sight of your sister's demure countenance that sends the blood up into your temples as well as into your cheeks? If you had been caught sketching Mr. Neville's handsome face, you could not have blushed more desperately. Come, Margaret, do not be foolish; is this your drawing, as you said all these were; or does a tale hang on this particular performance?"

"O, it is nothing!" said Margaret, with a forced smile. "Put them all back, Maud; we must walk now."

"Anything to get rid of me this morning, I suppose —

> 'O woman, in our hours of ease,
> Uncertain, coy, and hard to please!'

well, 'when pain and sorrow wring my brow,' Margaret, I hope you will be a 'ministering angel,' for

you are hard enough to please now. Let me show this wonderful picture to Mr. Sydney; I hear his voice in the library."

"No," said Margaret, impetuously; "give it me, Maud — give it me, I entreat you!" Her gesture was so imperious, and her voice so imploring, that Maud yielded up the drawing without further contest, and only shrugged her shoulders with an expression of impatience, and muttered —

"Well! it is clear enough now, that thereby hangs a tale, and a long one too, like one of Mr. Thornton's longest. Make haste, Margaret," she added, louder, as Walter approached the table; "put up your mysterious picture, and hide it from all indiscreet observers."

"Has Margaret *any* mysteries?" said Walter with a kind smile, which was soon changed to a grave expression as he observed her evident annoyance, and the quick manner with which she drew together her drawing materials, and hastened out of the room without speaking.

"Margaret's temper is strangely altered," said Mat when the door had closed upon her.

"Her temper is strangely tried," answered W who had observed the sort of half friendly and

teasing persecution which Maud carried on. She understood what he meant, and answered carelessly —

"Yes, I am afraid she is sadly in love with Edmund Neville;" and having planted a sting in more bosoms than one in the space of an hour, she took up a French novel, and with her feet on the fender, and her hand on the back of an arm-chair, she devoted the rest of the morning to this engrossing occupation. Meanwhile, Margaret had followed up, in the solitude of her own room, the train of thought which had been suggested by the sight of Edmund's drawing, and a kind of half instinctive, half indistinct presentiment whispered to her that her sister was more sinned against than sinning, and awakened in her mind an intense desire to ascertain the truth, and to clear up the mystery which hung about her actions.

From the moment that this idea took possession of her mind, she felt less overwhelmed with disappointment and annoyance; the last twelve hours had been the most painful she had ever spent. Her love for Edmund had not been withered by slow degrees, but blighted by a sudden and violent stroke. It still throbbed with lingering life, although the cold chill of destruction was rapidly gaining upon it. It was still

alive in her heart, for she could feel it die, and its last struggles testified to the strength of its previous existence. She had been mysteriously, solemnly, charged on the peril of her soul's safety never to think of him, and nothing had filled the space which that one ceaseless thought had occupied. Now there was an engrossing and unselfish interest sprung up in her mind, connected with him, and at the same time divested of the softening character which the indulgence of her own feelings would have attached to it. And thus those two young girls entered on that life of gaiety which their home presented; each with an aching heart, each keeping aloof from the other, hand in hand in spirit, with a steady purpose in view, and a deep and everpresent interest in one another. Maud Vincent with all her lynx-eyed curiosity, Walter Sydney with all his sympathetic intelligence, could not read that riddle, or solve the secret of that strange position. One day there was, that Ginevra was sitting by Colonel Leslie while he was drawing a plan of operations for some Indian campaign, while Sir Charles D'Arcy, a young officer quartered in the neighbourhood, was standing behind her chair and watching its progress: a servant came up and put a letter into her hand. Co-

lonel Leslie looked up and smiled as she left his side; "Something about the charades, love," he said carelessly. She smiled in return, and shook her head. That he might never suffer through her had been the most ardent of her prayers. and without a cloud on her brow she gazed on him, as he put his arm round her waist and looked into her eyes, till with a kiss he released her, and she went slowly out of the room. With faltering steps she reeched her own. Her heart fainted within her. Hope is sometimes still more difficult to bear than fear, or rather they are so closely allied, that each borrows from the other its most acute sensations. She broke the seal, and read as follows:—

"So much depends on the spirit in which you will receive and read this letter, that I entreat you to pause before you give way to your feelings, and take it for granted, that blindly to adhere under all circumstances to a predetermined course is the best and highest wisdom. I never felt to love you more than at this moment. All that you have been to me since the first hour of our acquaintance is present to my mind—your gentleness, your heroic patience and generous forbearance

under the most trying circumstances. I do full justice to the principles that have guided you throughout. I can even appreciate and respect the resistance which you have hitherto offered to my entreaties on a subject, on which your *feelings* are admirable, but on which an error in judgment misleads you. When we have adverted to this point, we have neither of us viewed it with sufficient calmness, or in the dispassionate manner which it demands. It is, doubtless, difficult to be calm, when on the decision of another the happiness or the wretchedness of a whole life depends, and when the obstacles that are raised against the only safe and proper course are the result of deplorable error and prejudice. You know well what I allude to; but I must inform you that the reasons which I formerly urged with such earnestness on your consideration, when I implored you to conform to the religion of your husband and your country, are become tenfold more imperative, from the tenor of my father's will. In short, there is no alternative now between that concession o your part, or such ruin and misery to us both as can not be calmly contemplated. I will not go over t ground that we have but too often trodden bef I will only repeat that what I ask of you is no off

against morality; no abandonment of the service of your Creator — that service which every reasonable creature owes to Him, but which finds its expression in one peculiar form or in another, according to the infinite variety and incidents of climate, of character, and of association, which serve to produce a number of religions, all resulting from one source, and tending to one end, common to all, and needful for all. You received the tenets which at present you hold from early instructors, whose country and whose sympathies are entirely different from those of the land which is now become your home, and in which my interests and my duties are centered. How can you, at your age, have any assurance that what you now believe is not merely the Truth, but the *only* Truth? Why cannot you adopt the religious convictions of your family, of your friends, and of one dearer to you (if you have not deceived me on that point) than all the world besides? Will you run the risk of ruining me in every sense of the word, on the chance that your early teachers were better informed, and more enlightened, than those friends, of whose virtues and of whose understandings you have yourself such a high opinion. It seems to me, that, viewed in this light, you cannot

hesitate any longer in following the line of conduct which alone can rescue us from an abyss of irreparable misery. The state of the case is this: I am not only ruined but dishonoured; unable to meet the most indispensable engagements, or even to look the world in the face again, if, while you persist in professing the Roman Catholic religion, I should acknowledge my marriage. I will never deny what you may choose to proclaim to the world, but this I plainly tell you, that on the day that you disclose this secret, (and I leave you at liberty to do so; this very letter in your hands furnishes you with evidence, and places me at your mercy,) I shall leave England for ever, and never set eyes on you again. If you persist in your present religious opinions, there are but two alternatives before you; one is a silence which must forbid our meeting but in crowds, or our ever speaking to each other but in fear and trembling. The other is, — an eternal separation, with the consciousness that you have driven your husband from his country and his home — blasted his name, ruined his fortunes, and broken his heart. If the love you have professed to bear me is anythi but a deception, or at best an illusion, I cannot d what your answer to this letter must be. Wh

parted from you, Ginevra, our misery seemed complete! How shall we meet again? If you remain blind to reason, obdurate to entreaty, sheltering yourself in a kind of high-wrought enthusiasm, of imaginary martyrdom, which doubtless is its own reward, that misery will sink into insignificance compared with the anguish I shall experience. I can scarcely command my feelings, or preserve my senses, when I reflect that an obstinate adherence to a bigoted creed alone stands between us, and divides two hearts, which love and religion itself have united. But why do I speak of love? You have never loved me as I love you; you have never suffered as I have done, or I should not now be forced to plead so earnestly for what would have been granted long ago, if you really had felt for me but one particle of the love I feel for you. But now, before you set the seal to our fate, remember that in my family, threats, alas! are not vain words. A fearful example has just proved it, and you will find from bitter experience that mine will have a literal fulfilment if you should drive me to despair. Do not imagine for an instant that you can consult others, or open yourself to your own family on the subject. The slightest hint at the real state of the case between us, is enough to involve the

most fearful consequences. None but myself can fathom the desperate intricacy of my position, and the least step you take in the affair, beyond the most implicit silence, will do the work of destruction as effectually as if you had proclaimed your marriage before the assembled world. And this, I again repeat, you may do, and you will do, if you are indifferent to what becomes of me, or care never to see me again. Ginevra! if you write to me to come to you, — if, with the simplicity of a child, and the tenderness of a woman, you resign yourself to me, and as the Scripture itself directs you, learn of your husband in meekness and in submission; what days of bliss are in store for us, what a life of happiness before us! You, who are the only woman I have ever truly loved — you, who have already given me proofs of heroic devotedness, and borne with such gentle patience the strange sufferings of our lot, now that on one hand every blessing is within our reach, and every misery threatening us on the other — will you hesitate any longer? I ask of you peace — honour — happiness! and will you let an opinion, blindly received and blindly maintained, weigh against the fidelity you vowed to me, the submission you owe me, the love you bear me? Let conscience speak to

you unbiassed by prejudice, and if you listen to its voice, this is the last time I shall have to tremble as I send — to tremble as I await — a letter from you. Ever your's,

"Edmund Neville."

Ginevra was alone when she read this letter; but if any one could have seen her at that moment, perhaps they would have found it difficult to gain from her countenance a clear insight into the state of her mind. She walked to the door and locked it, and then came back and sat down near the table on which that letter was lying. She started when her hand touched it, as if there was danger in its contact. Twice she passed her hand over her brow, and then her face flushed violently; suddenly her throat seemed to swell and her chest to heave; with both hands she seized the velvet ribbon round her neck, and tore it asunder. The ring it held flew out and fell at some distance on the floor. She took the letter and read it again, wildly glancing from line to line with a bewildered expression of doubt, of misery, and of fear. When she came to the last sentence, she slighted a candle and held the paper to the flame. It burned slowly, she watched word after

word, line after line disappear, till the fire reached her hand; she let it fall, and soon it mingled with the ashes. At that instant Margaret knocked at the door and told her that Mr. and Mrs. Warren were in the drawing-room, having come over to take leave of them before their departure for Germany. When Ginevra entered the room, Mr. Warren was struck with the deadly paleness of her face, and felt painfully concerned for her; but he guessed not at the depth of the anguish which that face betrayed. It was not, as he imagined, the dream of a girl, that had just been destroyed — it was the whole life of a woman that had been blighted. His wife having accidentally left the room with Margaret, he found himself alone with Ginevra, and with evident embarrassment he endeavoured to address to her a few words of sympathy. This was more than she could bear, the struggle was dreadful; she would have given worlds to break that silence, to question him, to tear the veil from his eyes and from her own, and burst through the shackles which were driving the iron into her soul. But she could not speak and be calm. She could not command the tumultuous throbbing of her heart — she gasped for breath. All traces of colour vanished from her cheeks; her lips were

partly open, but did not move. Her breathing was now scarcely discernible, so profound was the silence of her whole being. It was awful as the stillness that precedes the storm. Mr. Warren said, with hesitation,

"I hear that Edmund is miserable — that his father's will —"

The name, the words, fell on her ear — and swift as the hurricane over the ocean, across that silent spirit swept a tide of passion too powerful for the slender frame that quivered with its violence. Her eyes flashed, her breast heaved; over her cheeks, her neck, her temples, rushed the crimson hue of indignant feeling, and words rose to her lips as keen as her anguish — as strong as her despair.

"And what is a man's will?" she cried with convulsive agitation. "What is a man's will, that it should sever what God has united? Can the breath of his mouth, the stroke of his pen —. A will! a will! What will? In God's name, Mr. Warren, is it His will or man's will that must prevail? Heaven forgive me! I know not what I say, — my brain is giving way."

She fell on her knees with her face buried in her hands. Love and terror were contending with that in-

dignant passion, and in the fierce conflict every nerve was thrilling, every limb was quivering, every feature working. Like a ship that breasts the waves with every power it can command, she struggled, she fought, she wrestled with that great agony, and at last subdued it. When she lifted her head again, that vehement emotion had subsided. The silence that ensued was like the calm of Nature when the storm has passed away. The tokens of her deep misery, the signs of her bitter anguish, like the floating spars of a wreck on the surface of the stilled ocean, were discernible in her mournful eyes and in her languid step; but the light of heaven was shining again on the waters of affliction, and she was gazing with firmness on their deepening course. She pressed Mr. Warren's hand as she left him, and wrote the following letter to her husband: —

"I will not reproach you for the past, nor remind you of promises, of assurances, that seem to you no as if they had never been. Of love and of misery care not to speak. They have sunk too deep into heart to find vent in words. What can I say to that I have not said before? — how can I argue

my heart is breaking? But from your letter — your dreadful letter — I appeal to yourself; I call upon your conscience to witness against you. Oh, dearest Edmund, if it is a sin to lie to men, to lie to God is an unpardonable crime. If I was to abjure the faith which is as strong as life within me, if I protested by my acts, and with my lips, against what in my soul I believed — what in my heart I adored, — my very prayers would become insults to the Majesty of heaven. But is there indeed no alternative but that which you point out? — have I to choose between *my* guilt and *your* despair?

"Too much, perhaps, till now, I have yielded to your prayers, and blindly resigned my judgment to your's — proud and glad to suffer at your command, and for your sake. But now you have said too much, and too little. You have awakened fears that may not sleep again, and thoughts which cannot slumber. Vague assertions and mysterious warnings have not strength sufficient to bind me to a silence, which neither the laws of God or of man can warrant you in imposing upon me. The darkness in which you have involved me deepens every hour, and when in despair I would gain light at any price, you scare me with such fearful

phantoms, or such dreadful realities, that I pause and shrink, and yield to the terror that besets me. A thousand wild fears and vague suspicions dart through my mind. I have risen at night, and made my way to the library, and searched in books, and read over laws and statutes, till my head has throbbed with fatigue and anguish. I can nowhere find an explanation of the fate you assign to me. I cannot accept it, Edmund, nor by a sacrilegious lie avert it; and yet I cannot, I dare not say that I have courage to brave your anger, your threatened desertion, — to draw upon you all the misfortunes you speak of. Have mercy upon me, and explain yourself clearly. Prove to me that it is just and honourable to keep our marriage a perpetual secret; that you have the right to do so, — the right to compel me to silence by more fearful threats, by more powerful means, than if you pointed a dagger at my breast. Only prove to me this, Edmund, and I will be silent as the grave, till the day that death will give you freedom, and to me peace. Only, never forget, as you would not forget your soul's salvation, and your hopes of heaven, that what God has joined together, man cannot put asunder. Remember that I must ever stand between you and other hopes, between

you and other ties, as a shade, a cloud, a blighting vision!. O that it were not a crime to bid you forget me; that it were not a duty thus to cross your path and embitter your existence. Why it should be so, Edmund, why the pure gold of our love has turned into dross, you alone can tell. Why we cannot, hand in hand, meet with courage the evil days, the coming trials of life, and abandon *all* save truth and virtue, is more than I can conceive; but you terrify me with mysterious allusions, with fearful prognostications. What have you ever done — what can you ever have promised, to warrant such language? Believe me, there is no anger in my heart; only a love which grows wild with its own silence, and reckless of its own misery! Have pity on my anguish, and let my sufferings win from you a token of kindness, a patience for my grief. Your's in life and till death, "GINEVRA."

In answer to this letter Mr. Neville sent another; it was begun in a cold, concise style, evidently written with great bitterness of spirit. He gave no explanations, and offered no further persuasions, but only reiterated his former assurances, sarcastically charging her to follow the dictates of her own conscience, and

sacrifice him without hesitation, if her religious scruples required it. He could only assert again, that the inevitable consequences of such an act would be to drive him for ever from his country, and involve him in irretrievable disgrace. At the end of the letter he lost the tone of self-command with which he had begun it, and complained with violence of the coldness of her heart, and of what he called her indifference to himself. With jealous susceptibility he had brooded over the expressions in her letter, in which she had spoken of a wish to release him from the ties which bound them, and of only claiming his fidelity, on the score of duty, and perversely inferred that she would wish to part with him for ever, and felt no regret at their separation, but from motives of conscience. He announced to her that he was going abroad, and should be absent from England for some months; that change of scene was absolutely necessary to him; and that while she persisted in her present religious opinions, he could foresee no change in their mutual position, except one that would effectually prevent his ever returning to England. He again accused her of want of love for him, and of pity for his sufferings. He alluded to his own ill-health, and begged her to spare her re-

proaches and recriminations, which almost drove him to madness.

This letter he sent, and then, with his face buried in his hands, gave way to a burst of grief such as he had never before experienced. He pitied himself more than Ginevra, and perhaps he was right. The present and the future were gloomy enough, and there was not a ray of comfort to lighten that darkness. The examination he had made into his affairs had proved to him, beyond a doubt, that if his title to the property was forfeited, such hopeless pecuniary difficulties would beset him, such overwhelming claims for debts already contracted, that his situation would be worse than that of beggary. He had offended and estranged his sister, and already forfeited, in her eyes, and in those of the world, the merit of a ready resignation of the property; and it was with a kind of dogged and sullen determination that he now resolved to maintain himself in his present position as long as a gleam of hope remained that his wife might be brought to change her religion. It was with a kind of reckless and fierce indifference that he left his fate in her hands; at the same time there was in his heart a love for her, which added to all the misery he

endured. He felt alarmed at the vehement emotion which the sight of her handwriting awakened, and at the relentless hold which his passion for her seemed to take on his feelings. He could see no happiness for himself with or without her; there was nothing around him, or within him, that could supply the craving for happiness which pursued him. He was right to pity himself, and others pitied him too, when they perceived his altered looks and his care-worn expression. He went, and she remained at Grantley. His last letter had carried conviction to her mind, insomuch that she could no longer doubt that some overwhelming difficulties threatened him, in the event of a disclosure of their marriage. What was the exact nature, or the extent of those difficulties, she could not fathom; but after much thought and doubt, and hesitation, she at last resolved to observe, for the present, an absolute silence on the subject. Her resolution was confirmed by a letter, which she received about that time from Father Francesco. It held out hopes to her that, in the course of that year, he would return to Europe, and perhaps visit England on his arrival from America. As he had received permission from his ecclesiastical superiors to reside there awhile,

before his return to Italy, this announcement was to Ginevra like a message from heaven, and confirmed her in the purpose she had formed, at the same time that it opened to her a prospect of guidance and support, such as no other circumstances could have presented. And thus she remained in her father's house, to some an object of strange interest, to some of enthusiastic admiration, to all perhaps of a nameless compassion; for all felt that her lot differed in some ways from that of others; that there was a cloud resting upon her — Walter Sydney called it a halo, so mild was the light of her eye, so pure was the tenour of her life. Margaret alone had seen that cloud gather, and knew the dark source from whence it rose; but even when it had weighed on that shrinking head, her own heart had whispered that it was laden with misery, and not with shame. Her own wild spirits, her childish glee, her thoughtless prattle altered. She seemed to view life differently from what she had hitherto done. Her own disappointment, the weight of a secret, gratitude for the quiet and spotless course of her own life, seemed to deepen and to strengthen her character. Then Walter Sydney's lessons began to tell, and the peculiarity of such an affection as his

to strike her. The glimpse that had been given her of life, and of its miseries, had sobered, without chilling the ardour of her spirit; she seemed to discover that such an attachment as his, whatever its exact nature might be, was a treasure of inestimable value; and in her manner, with the same artless confidence as before, mingled a respectful tenderness which it had not yet evinced. A few months thus elapsed, and then Colonel Leslie informed his daughters that he had taken a house in London, and that in a few days they would remove there for some time.

CHAPTER II.

It was on a beautiful evening in the beginning of May, that Margaret Leslie walked slowly up the winding ascent, bordered with evergreens, which led towards Heron Castle. The delicate colours of the lilac and laburnum contrasted with the dark shining laurel leaves; the blossoms of the lime-trees perfumed the breeze, while the guelder roses spread beneath them a snowy shower of white petals. The rays of the setting sun came slanting through the spreading branches of the horse-chestnuts, and the birds were making that short and joyous twitter — that carol of glee — which rises from one bush, and then is answered from the recesses of another, taken up by the little tenants of some lofty branch, and then re-echoes before, behind, above us, in one clamorous concert of exulting melody. As Margaret went on she sometimes gathered a flower, and added it to those she already held in her hand, or she stopped before a lilac bush, of a deeper, bluer purple, than the rest, and bending over the fragrant branches revelled in their sweetness; sometimes she paused as an

opening in the trees presented a view in the valley through which the Grant was flowing, and beyond which rose the woods and the grey walls of her own beloved home. It was a Sunday evening, and the sound of distant church-bells came floating on the air with a deep-toned harmony which suited the scene and the hour. The low, distant bark of the house-dogs, that peculiarly English sound, accorded with it also; and the whistle of some stroller in the fields below added to the sensation of grateful rest — of permitted and blessed repose — which stole over the heart on that Sabbath eve. It brought to Margaret's mind some simple lines which, in her childhood, she used often to say, and she repeated them now with the fondness with which we cling to any form of words that has ever translated for us the emotions of our heart —

"Is there a time when moments flow
More peacefully than all beside? —
It is, of all the times below,
A Sabbath eve in summer tide."

The last word was on her lips when Walter met her, and drawing her arm within his, returned with her towards the Castle.

"This is very kind of you, dearest Margaret," he

said. "I was going to Grantley, but this is far better. Where is Ginevra?"

"She parted with me at the foot of the hill, to go to the little chapel at Heron. It is the hour for what she calls the Benediction. It is a beautiful name for a religious service; but, in gazing on that pure sky, and at these divine works of God, I, too, feel as if I received a Benediction; and to-night," she added with some emotion, "to-night it would seem a parting blessing, for I shall not spend another Sunday at home."

Walter did not answer, but pressed her hand again as they crossed the flower-garden, which lay on the west side of the building, and advanced towards an open window where his mother was sitting. Mrs. Sydney's pale, thin features were lighted up at that moment by the rays of the setting sun; and the peculiar hue which this circumstance imparted to her black dress, her close cap, her very white hands, the large Bible in which she was reading, and the vase of flowers by her side, gave her the appearance of one of Rembrandt's portraits.

"How beautiful your mother looks at this moment," whispered Margaret to Walter. He smiled faintly and said,

"Yes; she has the peculiar beauty which belongs to old age. It speaks of peace in this life, and a hope beyond."

"Dear Mrs. Sydney," Margaret gently said, as she approached the window, and placed herself on the broad ledge between it and the garden.

"Your old place, darling: welcome to it on this sunny evening. You are a gude sight for sair e'en, as old Andrew says whenever he catches a glimpse of you. But you are not come to say good bye, are you?"

"No, not that exactly, but to spend my last Sunday evening with you."

"Aye, you have done that for seventeen years, I think;" and Mrs. Sydney's voice trembled a little; "and now you are going to leave us —"

"For a few months," Margaret replied, absently, and fixed her eyes on Walter's face. He smiled in answer to her glance, but the smile only stayed there while she looked: it faded away immediately, and he turned towards the gate, and walked slowly towards the conservatory.

"Walter does not look well," Margaret said in a low voice.

Tears which had been on the point of starting be-

fore this remark, rolled slowly down Mrs. Sydney's cheek. Margaret, as she had often done when a child, hastily jumped into the room, sat down on the side of Mrs. Sydney's arm-chair, and putting her arm round her neck, said —

"*Is* not Walter well?"

"He is not ill, dear child."

"Then why does *he* look ill, and why are *you* unhappy?"

"Only a little dull, perhaps," said Mrs. Sydney, trying to smile, and effecting nothing but a slight quivering in the corner of her mouth.

"Mrs. Sydney, look at me. Now look at me."

Margaret had changed her position, and was sitting on a stool before the old lady. She had got hold of both her hands, and was gazing into her face with a mixture of tenderness and gravity, just modified by the least little degree of sauciness, which made her more irresistibly captivating than ever.

"Now, look at me, Mrs. Sydney, full in the face; and now, Mrs. Sydney, speak the truth, and tell me what it is that makes Walter unhappy."

"He is not unhappy, love."

"He *is* unhappy," retorted Margaret, vehemently,

"and so are you! — and so am I — if you will not speak."

"Why, dearest child, what can I say? You know how much we all love you, and you are going, and then —"

"And then, what?"

"And then, when you are in London, you will — see people you will like — who will like you — and then you will marry — and Walter will be very glad —"

"Oh! Walter will be very glad, will he?" and Margaret drew one of her namesakes from the vase of flowers before her, and as she pulled the red and white leaves alternately, repeated mechanically to herself the old French charm, "Je vous aime un peu, beaucoup, passionnement pas du tout." While Mrs. Sydney went on in broken sentences —

"He says you ought to marry — and that you will marry — and that we ought to wish it — and that Mr. Neville is now so rich, and his own master — and if you meet Mr. Neville in town — and then we shall be very glad you know, darling; but you will only come here sometimes — once a year, perhaps — and that makes us feel a little dull, and sorry, perhaps — and —"

"Mrs. Sydney, will you tell Walter — will you please to tell Walter — that I shall never marry Mr. Neville. Whatever else may happen, that never can be."

"Why not, darling?" asked Mrs. Sydney, with a little more animation of manner, and looking at the flushed beautiful face that was lifted up to her's.

"Because I would rather marry any one in the world now, than him."

"Even Walter himself, perhaps," said a voice at the window.

Margaret started; Mrs. Sydney quivered; it was her husband's voice; his touch was one which she dreaded on all matters of feeling, and he had now alluded to a subject which, beyond all others, she would have wished to withdraw from his grasp.

"*Even* Walter!" Margaret exclaimed. "That *even* is strangely out of place when connected with Walter's name."

"Why, you would not marry that fanciful old gentleman, would you?"

Mrs. Sydney's hands trembled as she wiped her spectacles, and said, in a low voice —

"Oh, Margaret, never joke on this subject."

Margaret pressed her hand, and with a bright colour in her cheek, and an earnest expression in her eyes, said to Mr. Sydney —

"If Walter's affection for me was not that of a brother for the most childish and troublesome of sisters, I can scarcely tell how I should answer your question. As it is, it requires no answer. There: I am come to the last leaf of my Marguerite, and to the last bit of nonsense I shall talk to-night."

A deep sigh from Mrs. Sydney caught her ear, and a murmured "Thank you, love!" followed it, as her husband walked on, with his hands in his pockets, and his back to the window.

"And if I am not to joke on this subject," said Margaret, timidly, and resting her head against Mrs. Sydney's knees, "may I know why? Yes, you are crying; I knew you were;" she continued, as the old woman's tears fell fast on her head; "and that is right — for to have a grief, and not to tell it, is a bitter thing — sad and bitter."

"Sad, but not bitter in some hearts," exclaimed the mother. "Oh no; not bitter in his. In mine sometimes, perhaps — I have so passionately wished him to be happy!"

"Not more than I do," Margaret said in a low voice,

Mrs. Sydney stooped and kissed her forehead. Margaret flung her arms round her neck, put her mouth close to her ear, and murmured —

"Would he be happy if I married him?" and then hid her burning cheeks on the neck of the astonished and agitated mother.

"Oh, Margaret! my child! my dear child! what have I said? — what have I done? It has been very wrong — he will say so. O, he must never know."

M rgaret raised her head, and a bright smile passed over her face, as she said —

"Then how can we make him happy, if we never tell him?"

"O, but my child! it cannot be! It is not true — my head is quite confused. I am sure I have done something very wrong. Walter will never forgive me."

"What — he?" said Margaret, with another saucy smile. "But tell me, now that we mean to make him happy — tell me how unhappy he has been, and when it began?"

"O, Margaret!" cried Mrs. Sydney, with increasing emotion, "he has loved you from your cradle —

he has adored you through your childhood — he has worshipped the ground you trod in thoughtless glee, and his whole existence has been one continual thought of you. I saw, not long ago, that the iron had entered into his soul: it was when the cloud first darkened your brow. 'I can bear anything but that,' he one day said, and I know he felt it."

The colour deepened on Margaret's cheek, as her own recent sufferings were alluded to. The wound was lately healed, and a shade of sadness passed over her features. She had committed herself more, perhaps, than if it was to Walter himself that she had held out the hopes which her words must have awakened in his mother's heart. She longed to be alone and to think. She felt suddenly frightened at the idea of seeing him again; she was not quite sure on what account; and when the door opened and Walter came in, her heart beat violently.

He sat down by her, and spoke in a quiet cheerful manner of her approaching absence, of her journey to London, and of the care he should take meanwhile of all that interested her at home. She gave him a long letter to read, which she had received that day from one of her village *protégés*, and asked his opinion upon

it. It was from a young orphan girl, in whose history they had both felt much interest. She had been crossed in love, as she expressed it herself, and deserted some months before by a young man, whose rank in life was somewhat above her own; and now she was urged by a neighbouring farmer to accept his hand. Riddell (that was his name) had loved her all along, she said, and she could find it in her heart to marry him, but she was doubtful still, and in many minds about it, and would take it as a favour if Miss Leslie would just advise her what to do. Whilst Walter was reading this letter, Margaret leant back in her chair, and looked at him with a sort of strange complacent curiosity. There was something very peculiar in the mixture of care-worn thoughtfulness, and yet of deep serenity, which marked his countenance. The lines about his eyes and brow were strongly marked, and seemed to bear the traces of suffering; but his mouth, on the contrary, had an expression of repose and sweetness somewhat peculiar in a person of his age. His hair was black, and very slightly tinged with grey; it grew thickly on the sides of the head, but left the brow and the temples discovered. She gazed on that pale thoughtful countenance, and connected its expression with the

many scenes of past life, which were now rising in her mind's eye, and remembered, with emotion, how much he must have borne, endured, and suffered, if, indeed, he loved her not as a brother, but as a lover. A lover! —she started almost visibly as the word crossed her brain. It seemed to her almost wrong to think of Walter as a lover, and he was so very unlike him who not long ago had held that character in her eyes. She shrank from that name, and felt frightened at shrinking. She would not willingly see him at her feet, or hear from him those words of love which she had longed to hear from Neville's lips; but she would readily place her hand in his, and walk by his side through life with a grateful heart and a hopeful spirit. He raised his eyes from the letter at that moment, and said —

"What advice would you give to this girl?"

"About this *marriage de raison*, do you mean?"

"Yes," he answered; "do you think she would be justified in marrying, without more love than she seems to feel for poor Riddell?"

"That depends upon what Riddell expects."

"True! but if he is satisfied with the grateful attachment she feels for him — which she describes herself as feeling?"

"If he is, I am," said Margaret, with a smile. "You are not romantic about your *protégés*, I see."

"That depends on what you term *romance.* Anny may find, in the depths of her own heart, a deeper interest for one who has loved her with the real romance of unrequited affection, than in the feverish dream which has haunted her imagination, rather than touched her feelings."

Walter looked at Margaret, and saw that her eyes were full of tears, and his mother rose at that moment and left the room. He folded the letter slowly; a kind of vague strange hope—an unnatural hope, it seemed to him — a sort of vision which almost scared him, so unreal did it appear — hovered before him.

"Margaret," he said, at last, "Margaret! do you really think that such an affection as you allude to—a devoted ardent attachment, sprung up unconsciously, unconciously nursed, blended with every hour of a man's life, deepened by every trial, mingled with every emotion of his soul — a love, that as soon as he suspected it, he struggled with, despaired of overcoming, and then exalted into a devotion which knew no hope, and looked for no return — do you mean that it would not seem to you impos-

sible, that strangely, suddenly, in an unexpected hour, that love should win back love at last?"

Margaret's tears were rolling slowly down her cheeks, but a smile was also on her lips, as she said, with her own peculiar tone of childish playfulness —

"Are you talking of Riddell now, Old Walter?" and she laid her hand on his.

He started, and said rapidly —

"Tell me, dearest Margaret, for mercy's sake tell me, do you understand me? — do I understand you, or have I been talking nonsense? — thinking aloud? It is all over now," he said with an effort, and then added, with a mournful smile, "I must have been dreaming, I think."

She pressed his hand, and one of those bright tears fell upon it.

"O Margaret, do not be sorry for me — if I have said too much, and that you have guessed the truth— do not be sorry for me; do not let a single thought of pain or of embarrassment disturb your gentle kindness, my precious Margaret, my own dear child! There are feelings which have their own reward, and if I do indeed love you, as never perhaps did any one love another before, this is happiness in itself, and enough

for me. That I have suffered I will not deny; but I have now seen you calm and bright again, as if no cloud had ever darkened your peaceful life. I have seen you turn with courage and patience to all the home duties and sacred charities of life. I have seen that trial has purified without hardening your heart, and I am grateful, deeply grateful, Margaret, and full of hope for the future—for your future happiness—for your —"

He stopped, for Margaret's arms were round his neck, and she was telling him, in a voice that would have been scarcely audible to any ears but his — that she loved him better than any one in the world; that she had sometimes thought so; that she was sure of it now. His heart was beating so violently that he could scarcely utter, but he subdued his own agitation to calm her's. He took her hand between his, and led her to the window. The shades of evening had fallen, and a few stars were beginning to shine on the face of the darkening skies. The beautiful river, like a silver ribbon, was reflecting in its bosom the rays of the moon, and not a breath of air disturbed the silence of the scene. For an instant they were also silent, and then Walter spoke; his voice belied the calmness of his manner: it was trembling with emotion.

"If I said just now, my Margaret, that in loving you I had had my share of earthly happiness, judge if this hour has not filled its measure. If no other joy was ever to be mine during the remainder of my life, than the memory of this, I could not complain. But listen to me, Margaret. From my soul, I thank you! With my whole heart, I bless you! I cannot love you more than I have done. It is not in man's power to love with more fervour, with more entire devotion; but more, yet more than ever, my life, my fate, my existence, will be in your hands; and to be to you all that father, brother, husband, in one, can be, in life, and till death, is my prayer, and I can scarcely believe it when I speak the word, it is now my *hope*. But, Margaret, listen to my firm, my unalterable resolution, formed even in this moment of overpowering happiness, and which, so help me God! I will keep. You shall not marry your Old Walter — you shall not give your youth, your beauty, your heart to him — you shall not bind yourself by irrevocable ties, till you have tried and tested your own feelings, and learned the full value of that priceless gift. O my beloved child! tell no one of the hope you have given me. Let not the world, or any human being, ever venture to interfere

or judge, if the day should come when, with the same adorable simplicity with which you have offered to intrust your happiness to my keeping, you should come to me and say — 'Walter, I was mistaken. You *may*, you *must* love me still, but not in the way we once thought of.' A silent pressure of the hand, a struggle, a prayer, and the dream would be at an end. This short life would be more sad, doubtless, and the thought of another more precious still than before; but none would know the trial, or the consolations of that hour, but yourself and me. Promise me this, Margaret!"

"And how long is my trial to last, you suspicious old Walter? I think I have done something very like proposing to you, and I am not quite sure I have not been refused in a very pretty sentimental manner."

Now, for the first time, Walter smiled, and the full tide of happiness seemed to rush over his heart.

"If in a year," he said; "if, after having spent several months in London, after having questioned your own heart —"

"O yes, I shall question it a great deal, and I know what it will answer; and if in a year's time I am

in the same mind, you will consent to make me your wife? Is that it? I am very much obliged to you indeed, dear Walter, for the promise, though it is a new kind of thing that you should be the one to stipulate for delay. You must propose to me in form when the time comes, and perhaps kneel on one knee too, and write me some verses, and do all sorts of things of that kind. O Walter, why did we never think of this before?" she exclaimed, with a sort of childish impetuosity; and then checking herself, as she saw an intense emotion pass over his face, while in a low voice he repeated — "Never thought of it!" — she added, seriously, "I might have. If we had not opened our hearts to each other to-day, I might still have misunderstood my own feelings."

Long did they talk of the past — earnest was the confidence — intimate the communications of thought and feeling between them. The great clock of the castle struck ten before they turned from that window; and Margaret, with her bonnet and cloak on, rushed into the little drawing-room, where Mr. Sydney was asleep in his arm-chair, and Mrs. Sydney watching for every sound and step; she kissed the pale thin cheek of Walter's mother, and murmured in her ear —

"He will forgive you; don't be afraid."

When she reached home she found Ginevra in the library playing some sacred music to her father. She glided gently into the room and placed herself near to her. The beautiful notes of Pergolese's "Stabat Mater" fell on her ear, and a ray of moonlight through the open window showed her her sister's face. It was in expression like what a painter would have assigned to the "Mother of Sorrows," and her thrilling voice seemed to reveal that she herself was "with sorrows heaviest weight oppressed," but supported under it by a more than human power. The sight of that meek suffering, of that calm desolation, affected Margaret more deeply than usual, from the contrast it afforded to the newly-acquired happiness which filled her own heart. But even then, perhaps, in the midst of suffering, and lonely suffering, there was a principle of strength and of consolation in the younger sister's heart, which was not fully understood by the other. That evening, at the same time, both had raised their eyes to heaven, and both had felt as if a blessing, *a benediction*, had descended on their heads. On one, the bright face of nature had smiled; its glorious hues, its perfumes, and its songs, had spoken a blessing

from the skies, and that evening hour had brought her a promise of happiness, the purest that earth can yield. The other had received a benediction from the altar, where she had knelt in the immediate presence of God, and she rose with the promise that none but God can make good — that suffering itself may be a pledge of mercy, a source of blessing, an earnest of heaven.

Margaret drew near to the piano as her sister finished the plaintive but glorious strain, and passing her arm round her neck, whispered —

"Ginevra, I *am* happy; would to Heaven that you were so too!"

A flash of joy passed over the pale face of the youngest sister.

"O mother of mercies!" she exclaimed, "thou hast pleaded and obtained!"

She passed her arms round Margaret's waist, and looked up tenderly into her face, while she said in the lowest whisper —

"Walter?" Margaret stopped her mouth with a kiss, and hurried away.

A few days after, the whole family left Grantley

for London, and it was settled between Walter and Margaret that he should follow them to town as soon as he had finished the arrangement of some affairs in the neighbourhood, in which his father was essentially concerned.

CHAPTER III.

COLONEL LESLIE'S sister, Mrs. Wyndham, was a widow, and one of those persons whom most people like, without exactly being able to assign a reason, for she was rather too much engrossed with worldly amusements to suit the thoughtful in character, and the strict in principle. She was not wise or witty, or quiet enough to be an agreeable, or even wholly untroublesome member of society. She was not kind enough to put herself much out of the way for the sake of others, nor generous enough to render them very important services. But she was always in good spirits, always glad to see her friends, always ready to promote their pleasures. She had a pleasant laugh, an undisturbable good humour, an agreeable way of shaking hands, exceedingly comfortable arm-chairs, nice books, with paper-cutters in them, on her tables, enough of luxury in her house for enjoyment, and not too much for show. She never said disagreeable things to people, nor of them to others, except to those to whom it happened at the moment to be peculiarly acceptable.

She had not been often at Grantley, and of her brother had hardly ever seen anything since the days of their early youth. She was delighted, however, at the idea of his coming to town, and complained with rapture of the fatigue it would be to take out her two nieces. She told everybody that they were *coming out*, and that girls were so unmerciful at first in their exactions about sitting up at balls, that she expected to be quite knocked up before the end of the year. Maud Vincent, to whom she was holding forth on the subject, could scarcely repress a smile as she thought of the two sisters, and especially the pale Ginevra, being supposed to pine for a succession of London balls; but she, too, felt an intense impatience for their arrival. No subject had ever excited her curiosity so much as the state of feeling in that family, and she longed to observe the attitude of those two sisters in society.

She spoke of them to everybody she met; announced Margaret as an heiress, and Ginevra as a genius, and took every opportunity of hinting that the latter was a very extraordinary person, and that women found it very difficult to get on with her. About the end of May the Leslies arrived, were established in London, and delivered up to Mrs. Wyndham's guardianship,

who was enchanted at having pretty girls to take out, as the beggars rejoice in borrowing squalid children. If she could not have had them for nothing, she would gladly have hired them. None had ever answered to her before, as well as the Leslies, for they excited in London society what is described in the French newspaper when they speak of the Chamber of Deputies,—at first, *attention*, and then, *sensation*. They were both so pretty, and yet so very different, that the names of the Lily and the Rose were spontaneously bestowed upon them. Both were perfectly refined, and the most fastidious ear or taste could not have pointed out a gesture or a word that could have offended their nicest susceptibility; but at the same time, they were both in their different ways original, and as unlike the common type of girls, as a young mountain ash and an Indian palm would be in the midst of a plantation of pollard willows. The secret circumstances which accompanied the appearance of both in the world, contributed to this peculiarity. They were very young, and everything was new to them but the deep emotions of the heart. They had both had experience in suffering, though in different degrees; but in other ways they were as artless as children. Margaret was pleased with

the world as she had been at seven years old with a toy-shop. Sights, music, plays, dancing, admiration, homage, all seemed to her a brilliant show, in which she performed her part with the eagerness with wich a child would fire off rockets, or ride in a turn-about; and the unceasing gaiety of the young heiress, and the courteous, merry, careless indifference with which she received all the adulation which she met with, strangely puzzled those that felt an interest in solving the problem. One man said to another —

"Do you think that little Leslie has a hard heart, or a cold heart, or a pre-engaged heart?"

"Perhaps she has no heart at all," answered his friend, listlessly, while he spied at her as if she might be an anatomical curiosity.

It was very different with Ginevra. The world to her was no empty show, no mere pageant, through which she moved with happy and careless indifference. As in her own heart, she felt a deep and agitating principle at work under the calm and even surface, so in the visible world, under its listless joys, and its tame exterior, her observant eye and keen spirits discovered the strivings of passion and the workings of the soul. She had not, like Margaret, lodged her

heart in a place of safety, and from that secur
place glanced on the world as on a tournamer
gay combatants rose and fell before her, wi
citing anything but a smile; that world to he
battle-field of life, the scene of a struggle
her earthly happiness depended. There w
woman who passed her in those crowded a
who might not one day be a rival, and court
which was her right and her due. There v
word uttered in those gay theatres, at those lon
in those dull morning visits, which did not m
secret anxiety swell, or some chord vibrate in
breast. Often Edmund's name was uttered
careless speaker — for he was rich, young,
they thought; and the good expressed hopes,
worldly formed speculations, and the bad sn
the hearing of the trembling wife, whose co
and fell, and whose heart throbbed with violenc
what seemed to others, the most insignifican
sation. She was more beautiful than ever; ar
not only admiration that her presence called
there were some whose feelings were roused to
that astonished themselves, by the strange fa
that Ginevra Leslie exercised. Cold and re

her manner, she gave no encouragement to those who addressed her in the language of love; but the varying colour in her cheek, the cloud of emotion which seemed to obscure the serene azure of her eyes, when any expression of the sort was uttered in her presence, excited and rivetted the interest she inspired. And cold as she was when made the object of direct attentions, there were moments when, through subjects of abstract discussion, her reserve seemed for an instant to give way, and the flashes of genius gave a momentary glimpse into the depths which that calm exterior habitually concealed. As she grew conscious of her own powers of captivation, and felt the influence which her beauty and her eloquence exercised on the crowd of admirers who surrounded her, she wondered in secret at the strangeness of her fate, and a painful smile, one of those smiles which, according to the character of the face over which they pass, are either bitterly scornful or inexpressibly mournful, flitted over her features, as she thought of the destiny which was forced upon her by one to whom she had given that love which others were so earnestly and so vainly striving to obtain. She became at once the idol of that world in which she had suddenly appeared. Her foreign ap-

pearance, joined to her peculiar manners, and her still more peculiar talents, combined in exciting a general interest, and it was impossible that she should not feel the contrast between the homage she received, and the admiration she inspired, and the bitter and miserable destiny which her husband assigned to her; but the love and devotion of others, instead of healing, seemed but to deepen the wounds which her heart had received; and when bursts of admiration and murmurs of applause attended some brilliant exercise of her talents; when, with the enthusiasm of genius, and the simplicity of manner which belonged to her, she had electrified her hearers by some incomparable strain of melody, or by an improvisation, in which thought seemed to hurry on language with a startling and resistless impetuosity, she would return to her place, and sit in silence with one image before her eyes, and only value the praises resounding in her ears, as tributes to be one day laid at the feet of her undeserving husband.

The more Margaret's attention was directed to her sister, the more earnestly she watched her manners and her conduct, the more confirmed she felt in her conviction that there was something very extraordinary in her history. She never could detect the slightest

indication in her manner, of anything that would have justified Maud's impression of her character, or that would have tallied with the glaring impropriety of conduct which she had herself detected on that memorable morning at Grantley; and it was with almost as much emotion as Ginevra, that she heard, in casual conversation, that Edmund Neville was expected in town, in the course of the following week. The weather was become intensely hot, and London was crowded to excess. Both sisters were fatigued with the exertions of the last few days, and Margaret was annoyed at the delay in Walter's arrival. He wrote that he was still delayed in the country by business; but in her secret heart she thought that this prolonged absence betokened a too confident security, and she said to herself, that, after all, he ought not to be quite so "*sûr de son fait*," and leave her for so many weeks, without looking after her proceedings. She might have fallen in love with ever so many people, who had been making up to her; and when she received another letter again indefinitely putting off his arrival, it just occurred to her, that, perhaps, she would flirt a little, very little, but just enough to vent the irritation which this intelligence had produced.

There was to be that evening a party at Mrs. Wyndham's, to which her nieces had promised to come early; her house looked on Hyde Park, and the windows were all thrown open to catch the faint breezes which now and then stirred the muslin curtains, among which vases of flowers and coloured lamps were arranged. There were very few people arrived when Colonel Leslie and his daughters entered the room; but Margaret's rapid glance soon discerned a young man whose face was familiar to her, from having repeatedly met him, during the last few weeks, without having as yet ascertained his name. He was in deep mourning, and his grave and mild countenance had somewhat arrested her attention. He seemed to take very little part in society, and yet they had scarcely been to a single ball or party without seeing him, and especially remarked how frequently his eyes were fixed on Ginevra. She had come to the conclusion that he must be a timid admirer of her sister's, and it rather amused her to watch this kind of mute devotion, on the part of the silent young man. She wished to ask Mrs. Wyndham what his name was, but as she was busy receiving her guests, she could not obtain her attention, and both *sisters sat down* together on a couch opposite to the

window. Sir Charles d'Arcy (one of the young men who had spent some days at Grantley in the winter) left the balcony, and placed himself on a chair, next to the sofa. He nodded to the silent young man, who looked up from a book of prints he was examining, and nodded also with a good-humoured smile. By degrees he took part in the conversation that was going on between the sisters and Sir Charles, and Margaret observed that he seemed particularly anxious to catch every word that fell from Ginevra's lips. After some insignificant remarks, Sir Charles said to the stranger,

"Have you heard from Anne, lately?"

"Yes," he answered: "I believe she will be in town in a few days."

"To meet Edmund, I suppose, then."

Margaret looked at her sister, and so did the stranger, and all three coloured deeply.

"He has been at Paris all this time — has not he?" again asked Sir Charles.

"Yes," said the unknown, with his eyes still fixed upon Ginevra: "spending a great deal of money, I am told, and leading a very gay life."

"*Any matrimonial* project *en l'air*?"

"There have been reports of the kind, I believe;
it," he added, after a pause, "I do not believe them
) be true."

"Who do they name?" said Ginevra, in so low a
voice that no one heard her. "Who do they speak
of?" she repeated, in so loud a tone that this time the
question startled her neighbour.

"O! Mrs. Fraser, the beautiful widow that people
talk of so much."

"Would Miss Neville approve?" inquired Sir Charles
d'Arcy.

"I don't know," answered the unknown, without this
time raising his eyes from his book.

Mrs. Wyndham at that moment joined them, and
said carelessly,

"O, are you speaking of that tiresome Edmur
Neville? He has just written to put off his comi
again, and it quite spoils a little plan of mine, fo
had reckoned upon him."

"What is that?" said another young man.

"Our Play," said Mrs. Wyndham; "I want h
act. You know it is for a charity, and that ever
ought to help us who can."

"*Does* he act well?" asked Sir Charles.

"O, yes!" Margaret said; and then added, as if to herself, "and more parts than one."

The silent young man bent his head down over the book, and said, in so low a voice that she only heard, and only just heard it,

"Have you any reasons for saying so?"

Margaret's eyes met his, and both again coloured deeply. He rose immediately, and she proposed to Ginevra to move into the next room. As they passed Lucy Vincent, who was sitting at the tea table, Margaret stopped and asked her who was the young man who was standing in the doorway, speaking to Sir Charles d'Arcy.

"O, that is Mr. Charles Neville; he is a cousin of your friend Mr. Neville, and engaged to marry his sister, I believe. Don't you know him?"

Margaret felt her sister's arm tremble within her's, and both moved into the balcony, where the air was cooler, and the lights less glaring. They sat there alone for a few minutes.

Margaret's thoughts wandered to the terrace of Heron Castle, to the flower garden of Grantley, to the *old library* where Walter sat and read while she played to

him; she thought of his love and of his kindness, a smiled to herself as she remembered the revenge she h planned — how fatiguing it would be to flirt with othe — how soothing it was to think of him. Meanwhil where were Ginevra's thoughts during that instant silence? Her lips were tightly drawn together, a tears were gathering in her eyes. Her heart was si with hope deferred — it was sore with a new anxie — it felt too bruised to meet a coming struggle. S laid her forehead one moment on her sister's shoulde as if to rest her aching brow. The rustling of a cu tain behind them startled her, and turning round s saw Charles Neville standing close to her. He s down on a chair by her side, and said, in a ki manner,

"I am afraid you are very tired, Miss Leslie."

She nodded assent, and said,

"Have you seen the Warrens lately?"

"No; are they in town?"

"Not that I know of."

"They are great friends of your's, are they not?

"They have been very kind to me. I have a gre regard for Mr. Warren."

"*Have* you been long in England?" she inquire

feeling a strange pleasure in speaking to a near relation of Edmund's, and of hearing names of people and places which were connected with him.

"Yes; I left Clantry about six weeks ago. It was hard to leave it in all its spring beauty. It is such a lovely place. You have heard the Warrens speak of it, I suppose?"

"I have often heard of it," she replied.

"You know Edmund Neville, don't you?" said her companion, with some embarrassment.

She had never been asked that question before, and it produced a strange impression upon her.

"Yes; I know him," she slowly answered; and the crimson colour rose in her cheek as she spoke.

"He is at Paris, you know?"

This had been said before her already, and Charles Neville was aware of it. Why did he repeat it now? She darted upon him a quick glance of inquiry, which he met by a piercing gaze, which intended to read into her thoughts, fell as if the very expression of her eyes, the hurried sigh that escaped her, might ruin Edmund. Faint and giddy, she snatched a glass of water from a passing tray, and then, in as indifferent a tone as she *could command*, inquired,

"When was it you said that Mr. Neville was expected in town?"

"His sister hopes to meet him next week, but it seems uncertain, from Mrs. Wyndham's account, whether his arrival will not be again postponed. Miss Neville," he added with hesitation, "will be anxious to make your acquaintance — she has heard so much of you from —"

He paused, and Ginevra fixed upon him her eyes with an almost expression of surprise and of fear, and he added hastily,

"From the Warrens, you know." He then talked of other things, and soon after walked away.

Ginevra turned to Margaret to propose returning home, but saw that she was engaged in an animated conversation with Frederic Vincent; all appearance of listlessness and fatigue had disappeared from her countenance, but, as they talked, her manner grew more earnest, and her expression more thoughtful. She seemed annoyed when Colonel Leslie made a sign from the door that he wished to go; and while they were putting on their cloaks in the hall, Ginevra heard her sister say, in a low voice, to Frederic Vincent,

"*When shall* you come back?"

"On the night of the play," he said, "and in the meantime speak to Lucy; she knows all about it."

As they passed before his two sisters she saw that Maud looked significantly at her brother and at Margaret, and said something in a low voice to Lucy. Ginevra thought of Walter, and a painful fear crossed her mind as she stepped into the carriage; Margaret heard the deep sigh that escaped her, and looked anxiously into her face.

"What is it, Ginevra?" she whispered, struck with her more than usual paleness.

"Nothing, dearest," she answered faintly.

"Ah, never anything else," retorted Margaret impatiently — "*On se brise contre cette glace*" — and leaning back in the corner she closed her eyes, and did not speak again that night.

During the next ten days both sisters appeared equally restless, and equally reserved in conversation; at the same time each felt, and in her manner evinced, an anxious solicitude about the other. Each day that passed without bringing any intelligence of Edmund's arrival, heightened Ginevra's disquietude to such a degree, that she could only preserve her calmness by efforts that nothing would have enabled her to make

but an early acquired and long continued habit of self-command. Her courage never threatened to give way, except when she anticipated a state of things that would obscure the view she took of her line of duty, and now this danger seemed impending. Sometimes she asked herself if she ought not at once to break the silence which her husband had imposed upon her, open her heart, and reveal her history to her father, and brave all the consequences of such a step; but the fear of driving Edmund to despair, of banishing him for ever from England and from herself, compelled her to pause, and at least to see him once again, and by all the might and all the power which the justice of her cause, and the fervency of her love could give, to lead, to force him, into the paths of truth and honour. In the meantime she felt frightened at the pertinacity with which Charles Neville sought her acquaintance, and followed her steps; and to avoid this scrutiny often turned from him abruptly, and then again sought his presence, with the hope that he might let fall a word about Edmund which would confirm or dispel her harassing doubts. She was also anxious about Margaret, who seemed unusually absorbed and pre-occupied, and spent a great deal of time with the Vincents. She

eagerly looked for Walter's arrival, and felt doubly anxious when a letter from Grantley at last accounted for his prolonged absence. A severe illness had confined him to his bed for several weeks, and he had purposely enjoined his family, and the Thorntons, to refrain from mentioning it in their letters to London, as he wished (so he expressed it to them) that Margaret's enjoyments should not be interfered with by the knowledge of his sufferings. He secretly resigned himself to this absence, from the conviction that her feelings would not be fairly tried if he was present to watch her movements, and by his presence maintain a constant appeal to an affection, the existence of which, whatever might be its nature, he could not doubt. He was resigned, but resignation is not happiness, and if Walter never indulged an impatient thought, or uttered any but kind words during that long illness and that slow recovery; if he smiled cheerfully when his mother tried to amuse him, and answered his father's rough raillery, or Mrs. Thornton's explanations of the exact nature of Margaret's character, and of the utter indifference, which by this time she must have attained to, and about all her friends at Grantley, it was a proof that, in the charity which beareth all things and

is kind, he was a greater proficient than most people. Margaret's earnest expressions of feeling, the tears that started to her eyes as she received this account, and communicated it to Ginevra, dispelled some vague fears which the latter had conceived, and both talked of Walter, as they drove through the parks that afternoon, with an interest and a tenderness which would have done more good to his aching head, and stilled the rapid beating of his feverish pulse, as he lay on his couch, near the window, at Heron Castle, than all the Eau-de-Cologne and saline draughts which his mother thrust upon him, or even than the globules which Mrs. Thornton occasionally produced with a tiny spoon out of a tiny bottle.

"We shall stay at home, Ginevra, to-night, shall we not?" said Margaret. "We will not go to that tiresome party at Lady Tyrrell's. I shall like one quiet evening so much. I have never time in the day to write a really long letter to dear Walter, and I have a thousand things to tell him. — You do not want to go, do you?"

"No, dearest; while you write to Walter, I will finish altering that last scene in the translation of '*Simple Histoire*,' which Mrs. Wyndham disliked. By

inserting some of the beauties of the novel itself, into this translation of the French drama, it can be greatly improved. They have been rehearsing the first acts, and are impatient for the conclusion."

As Ginevra was finishing this sentence, they were passing through Grosvenor-gate into Park-lane. Margaret, who was reclining in the carriage, with her bonnet very much blown back by the soft west wind, and looking vacantly before her, started as she passed Grosvenor-street, and made a kind of exclamation. Her sister looked down the street, and saw Frederic Vincent, with several other young men, riding towards the Park.

"I thought Mr. Vincent was only to come back on the night of the play," Ginevra said, as they passed him; and Margaret answered, with a look of absent pre-occupation,

"I thought so too." She did not say another word till they reached home.

As they stood in the drawing-room, where a servant was arranging in a *jardinière*, some flowers which they had bought at a nursery-garden, Ginevra said —

"Had you not better write immediately to Mrs.

Wyndham, to say that we do not mean to go to Lady Tyrrell's to-night?"

Margaret appeared not to hear at first, and made a rose tree change places with an azalea, greatly to the damage of her straw-coloured gloves.

"Shall *I* write?" said Ginevra again.

"O, no! thank you," and Margaret slipped into the sofa behind the writing table, took a pen, bit the very tip of its last feather, and then, as her sister was leaving the room, called her back, and said —

"On second thoughts, I think I shall go to Lady Tyrrell's. What will you do?"

"Would you like me to go?"

"Not if you had rather stay at home."

"Then I think I will," said Ginevra, and went up to her room.

She felt depressed and anxious on Margaret's account. For a short time she had deemed her happiness secure, and now it seemed to her that a fresh cloud, slight, indeed, as the first that rises in a summer sky, hung over a future which had seemed so serene. Colonel Leslie dined out that day, and the two sisters were again alone after dinner, and, drawing a table near the window to profit by the remaining light, and

opening it wide to catch the scanty coolness of a London summer evening, they both placed before them, one her writing paper, and the other the manuscript on which she was employed. But both pens were idle, both young faces were serious. Margaret seemed absorbed in her thoughts, now and then writing a few lines, and then gazing at the lamp-lighter, as he swiftly moved from post to post, as if she felt the deepest interest in his occupation. Ginevra was writing with more perseverance, but occasionally glanced at her sister. Their eyes met, and then Margaret smiled gaily, and said —

"How is Miss Milner getting on?"

"I was not thinking of Miss Milner, I was thinking of —"

"Who?" asked Margaret, in the same tone.

"Miss Leslie," said Ginevra, with a sweet but rather melancholy smile.

"What about her?"

"That I wished, oh! how I wish that she had a sister older than herself, a sister in whom she could have confidence, whose advice she would not justly mistrust — whose own heart might open itself to her, and thus gain a right to ask for an insight into her's.

One," Ginevra continued, with increased emotion, "who had not lost all right to warn others, except through that single claim which she possesses, Margaret, which she indeed possesses — experience in suffering."

Tears rushed into Ginevra's eyes as she said this. Margaret grew red, and looked at the paper before her without speaking.

"You must think it very presumptuous of me to speak to you even in this way, Margaret; you have been to me all tenderness, 'and friend to more than human friendship just.' There has been no harshness in your words, no scorn in your eyes, and, from my soul, I feel the value of that forbearance; and, oh! my sister, my dearest sister! by all I have suffered, by all I suffer every day, by all I endure and dare not speak of, listen to me, and think of what I say, before you deviate by one line from the path of truth and openness — before you complicate your duties and blind your own eyes that they may not enlighten your own heart."

"It would be a great advantage for us all," answered Margaret, in a half-discontented, half-consequential manner, "if we spoke the truth to one

another. But as it seems that *that* is impossible, we must do the best we can, each in our own way."

An expression of disappointment passed over Ginevra's face, and she took her pen again with that silent resignation which always touched Margaret. She looked at her with tenderness, then bit her lips and gazed at the ceiling; then wrote with rapidity another page of her letter; a smile played on her lips, then she grew grave again, and placing the letter on Ginevra's manuscript, said —

"Read that."

These were the lines she pointed to with her finger.

"And if you ask me, dearest Walter, what I have seen most beautiful in London, I must answer, Ginevra! If you ask me what I have seen most extraordinary, I must answer, Ginevra. What most inexplicaple, *her* character. What most singular, *her* position in her family and in the world. Inspiring an irresistible sympathy, and repelling its approach; attracting confidence, and never yielding it in returnt capable of every sacrifice; ambitious of every virtue; and yet resigned to a life without object and withou; interest. Dearer to me every day that we live, yet more

and more estranged from me, with sorrows which none but herself can know, with joys, if she has any, with which she allows none to intermeddle. I feel tempted every hour to exclaim, 'Who is not a stranger to her?' — 'Would to Heaven I knew her better, or loved her less!'"

Deeply Ginevra coloured as she read this letter; and then, to Margaret's surprise, she tore it in pieces. This action was so unlike her usual manner, that she looked at her with inexpressible surprise.

"Margaret," she said, with agitation, "you cannot speak of me in this manner, for you know more than in this letter you would appear to know. You cannot complain of my reserve, when in an hour," her voice trembled as she spoke, "a dreadful hour to us both, you had a glimpse of my history, and suspected," she hid her face in her hands, "the —"

"The truth. Oh, for heaven's sake! my sister — my Ginevra — what is the truth? I can bear this silence no longer. It is a torment of every day — of every hour. Speak to me, I implore you!"

Ginevra, like all gentle people, when deeply agitated, grew almost violent in manner, under the influence of strong emotion.

"Margaret, I have told you this cannot be. This must not be. I have told you that my own weakness — that the faults of — that my faults have complicated all my duties, and gone far towards bewildering my mind; but I still know right from wrong, and the silence you reproach me with, is a sacred duty, which you must help, not thwart, me in accomplishing."

"I have never seen you thus moved," said Margaret. "Forgive me, Ginevra."

"Forgive you! Oh! Margaret, Margaret! would that I had nobody to forgive but you! Let me hold your hand on my head, for its coolness does me good. I have struggled so much; I am better now, thank you, dearest."

At that moment a loud knock at the door announced Mrs. Wyndham's carriage. Margaret rose hastily from her knees, on which she had sunk by her sister's side, kissed her cheek, and hurried down stairs, murmuring to herself — "This shall not last, no, not if I have to move heaven and earth to find out the truth." She jumped into the carriage, and found Mrs. Wyndham in an uneasy state of mind about her play; her Prima Donna was in bed with a bad cold, which had *some appearance of* measles, and she was in the great-

est perturbation on the subject. Margaret, as sh
rived at the party, hastily glanced round the r
and seeing Lucy Vincent on a sofa near the chir
immediately went up to her. After a while, Fre
Vincent joined them, and talked to her in a low
during the remainder of the evening.

CHAPTER IV.

THE next two days brought matters to a crisis about Mrs. Wyndham's theatricals. Her *prima donna* was fairly laid up with the measles, and the unfortunate manager, with the note which conveyed the melancholy intelligence in one hand, and the translated and corrected manuscript in the other, looked at her disconsolate troop with a helpless expression of distress, which drew a smile even from the most zealous amateurs. Every impossible mode of supplying the vacancy was successively suggested and rejected. The play *must* take place, for the little theatre in — street had been engaged; and if it failed, instead of gaining money for the distressed weavers, which had been the purpose in view, there would be a pecuniary loss, which could not be for an instant contemplated. Rather than give up the play Mrs. Wyndham would act herself: this suggestion made the actors' hearts quail with apprehension, especially that of Sir Charles D'Arcy, who was to enact Lord Elmwood, and who pictured to himself the fatal vivacity with which Miss Milner would

frolic about him, in the event of their kind manager undertaking the part herself. An embarrassing silence followed the suggestion, and then Mrs. Wyndham exclaimed,

"If Ginevra would but act, it would be perfect."

A murmur of approbation rose, and everybody said, "She must!"

"She would not hear of it when it was first proposed," Mrs. Wyndham remarked.

"O, but now that it will be a real kindness to do so," one actor replied.

"And that the whole thing would fail if she refused," said another.

"And that it is for such a great charity."

"And that the theatre is already engaged."

"And that everybody knows that she can if she will."

The spirits of the troop revived. It would have been too dreadful to give it all up; and by the rapid transition of mind, that jumps from hope to security, it was considered *certain* that Ginevra would consent, and twelve o'clock the following day was fixed upon for the next rehearsal, — Mrs. Wyndham pledging herself to produce her niece, "or a substitute," she

added, which conclusion somewhat damped again the exultation of the departing amateurs.

Perhaps Mrs. Wyndham could not have arrived at her brother's house at a more favourable moment, for the success of her project, than the one she accidentally hit upon. She found him alone, and having explained to him fully her plans — her charitable intentions — her disappointment — her difficulties and her hopes — she obtained from him, not only a consent that his daughter should take a share in the performance, but he even expressed a wish that she should do so, if it was not disagreeable to herself. Colonel Leslie's adoration of Ginevra was such, that to see her, to watch her, and to see others carried away and transported by their admiration of her talents, was the most intense enjoyment he was capable of. *Blasé* and indifferent himself to all species of amusement or success, the enthusiasm which had lain deep in his character, and which had for awhile burst out in his youth and then been forced back into silence by the influence of an unchastened grief, had centered on his youngest daughter, the living image, the fair reflection of past days of happiness, in which all the powers of his mind — the pleasures of imagination, as well as the emo-

tions of the heart, — had been called into play. Her strange beauty, her stranger charm, her peculiar genius, stirred his soul, and revived his enthusiasm. He did not wonder as others did at her gravity — at the shade of sadness which hung about her. In his presence it melted into tenderness, and harmonised with his feelings; but he sometimes felt anxious about her. He fancied the climate of England, and the absence of excitement — that excitement, which the very air of Italy carries to the soul — which seems to reach it through every sight, through every sound — through which idleness itself is intellectual, and solitude animated, must oppress her spirits and affect her health. He watched her pale cheek grow paler every day, and thought her life wanted interest and variety. Strange, how we live, often day by day, hour by hour, by the side of those we love best, who love us most, and never guess the secret influences which act on their souls, the secrets of the hidden life carried on within the folds of that outward existence, which, after all, is but the coarse shell of our real and immortal being. It is not strange that in such a case we should make mistakes in our dealings with others, and that sometimes, in roughly handling the shell, we bruise the

pearl within. Colonel Leslie rejoiced at an opportunity of rousing Ginevra's spirits, and animating her to exertion, and he warmly urged her to accede to his sister's request. She resisted, and with more energy and decision than she usually evinced on questions of this sort; and it was with a heightened colour that she expressed her reluctance and distaste for the public appearance which she was requested to make. Mrs. Wyndham's perseverance annoyed her, and she peremptorily refused.

"Well, then!" Mrs. Wyndham ejaculated, "I see how it will be. We must put off the play, and ask Mrs. Fraser, as soon as she arrives, to take that part, and then, no doubt, we shall easily get Edmund Neville to act Lord Frederic Lawnley."

Ginevra changed colour, and stammered a few unintelligible words, which instantly conveyed to Mrs. Wyndham's mind the impression that her resolution was not irrevocable, and with a woman's quickness, (this time justifiably at fault,) she traced this hesitation to a reluctance on her part, to lose an opportunity of displaying her talents, especially when her place was likely to be supplied by a person of whose beauty and cleverness so much had been said. Rather amused at

this supposed little feminine weakness, she did not immediately take the hint, and went on descanting on Mrs. Fraser's charms — the irresistible fascination of her countenance, her smiles, and her brilliant repartees — little aware of the nature of the pain she was inflicting, or that the contracted brow and quivering lip, with which those comments were received, were the indications, not of a wounded and anxious vanity, but of feelings that were tried in that moment almost beyond endurance. Thoughts of vanity were so far removed from Ginevra's mind, that it did not occur to her to suppose that others would attribute them to her (nor would she have cared if they had), and it was from a sudden impulse that she announced that her mind was changed, and that she would act if it was desired. Mrs. Wyndham gladly accepted, Colonel Leslie expressed great pleasure at her intention, and the whole thing was arranged before Ginevra had well considered what she had pledged herself to. It did not belong to her character to attach much conventional importance to any circumstance of the kind. To prevent a closer association between Edmund and Mrs. Fraser than the usual forms of society afford, was the only prominent idea in her mind when she undertook the task, and to

perform it to the best of her ability, in justice to those who had intrusted it to her, was her only care in connexion with it. Her whole soul was possessed with one feeling, which grew every day more intense — her ardent desire for Edmund's return to England; she felt as if to see him once more would relieve the heavy load of anxiety that was weighing upon her mind. If she could but once meet his eyes again, she would read in their expression whether she still was beloved; she would know the real nature of the barrier which had so fatally risen between them, and exchange, at least, one species of misery for another — as great, perhaps, but less tormenting than suspense.

Margaret agreed to take some trifling part in the piece that was to follow the "Simple Story," and day after day both sisters went to rehearse at Mrs. Wyndham's. Ginevra's acting disappointed the expectations which had been raised on the subject. Nothing could be more graceful than her movements, more musical than her intonations, or more intelligent than the conception of her part, but to those who had heard her recite or sing, there appeared in her acting a great want of the fire and sensibility which on those other occasions had been so remarkable. An involuntary

languor seemed to hang over her actions, and when she had spoken the sentence allotted to her, she often appeared abstracted and indifferent to the whole affair. Her sweetness of temper never varied, or her obliging readiness to satisfy others; she never disputed any point, and revised and altered her translation of Scribe's drama, as often as a suggestion was made to her on the subject. Once, during a rehearsal, when she was leaning silently against one of the pillars, while a scene which she did not appear in was going on, and gazing listlessly on one of the painted scenes, whose rough delineations of temples, statues, and villa gardens, caused her thoughts to wander back to Verona, to the Casa Masani, and to the days of her youth, (for though she was not yet nineteen, there is a kind of youthfulness which sorrow blights far more effectually than time, and her's had withered at an early age) her attention was roused by the arrival of Mrs. Wyndham, on whose arm was leaning a woman very smartly dressed, and whose appearance was on the whole rather pleasing; she was tall and slim, had very large eyes, with an expression, which, while it approached as nearly to a squint as is consistent with beauty, added something peculiar and wild to her countenance. Her mouth was

large, and her teeth fine, and in the whole manner and attitude of this new comer, there was an *étourderie* and a grace, an impertinent civility, and a reckless, but not unfeminine audacity, which made a great contrast with her friend Mrs. Wyndham's serious frivolity, and earnest worldliness. Ginevra guessed who she was, at once, and her heart beat very fast when her aunt presented to her Mrs. Fraser. She bowed coldly, and at that moment was called upon to rehearse the next scene, while Mrs. Wyndham and her new friend stood on the stage, and whispered loud enough for a few words now and then to reach her ears. The name of Neville was twice pronounced, and then Mrs. Fraser said in a very low voice, "A perfect *Héros de Roman.*" The scene that Ginevra was rehearsing was one of the gayest in the whole piece, and this time she acted as ill as possible; and Mrs. Fraser, who had taken up her spying-glass, and in the intervals of her conversation with her neighbour examined her with a sort of careless indifference, shrugged her shoulders, and whispered loud enough for Ginevra to hear, "*Elle ne s'y entend guère.*" Mrs. Wyndham then looked at her attentively, and was struck with the painful and care-worn expression of her face, and it suddenly occurred to her

that it would be an advantage to the performance, and, as she imagined, a relief to her niece, if she was to yield her part to Mrs. Fraser, who was evidently dying to act, and very much disappointed at having lost the opportunity. In a whisper she conveyed this idea to the latter, who shook her head, but looked delighted, and in the first pause that occurred, Mrs. Wyndham took Ginevra's hand in her's, and finding it cold and trembling, she said in a half playful, half serious manner —

"We have treated you very ill, dear love, in teazing you into this. I am sure it is too much for your strength, and will make you quite ill at last. I dare say Mrs. Fraser would take the part even now, if you wished it."

"You must get me another Lord Frederic in that case," interrupted Mrs. Fraser, with a significant glance at the respectable and shy young man who was enacting the reckless hero of the piece, and who every day petitioned to be let off.

"I know whom you would have," said Mrs. Wyndham; "but he is not here."

"He would come if I insisted upon it," Mrs. Fraser

negligently replied, while she played with her fan. "Shall I write to him?"

This was too much. Ginevra looked up, and the blood rushed to her face; flashes of light seemed to dart from those pale blue orbs which a moment before appeared so languid and heavy. Mrs. Fraser put out her hand for the manuscript which Ginevra held, and exclaimed —

"O, I could learn it in a minute, and rehearse to-morrow, and by next Monday our *jeune premier* will be arrived."

Ginevra looked her full in the face, grasped the sheet of paper, as if she would rather have died than let it go, and said in Italian, and with a violence that amazed all the bystanders —

"I will not have my part taken from me."

Mrs. Fraser pressed the tip of her tongue against her slightly closed teeth, and made a curtsey, which, by its graceful, profound, and sweeping magnitude, seemed calculated to afford a refuge in all the embarrassing positions in life, and retreated a few steps while she glanced her eye over the detached sentences of the manuscript. Her wish to act increased threefold as she perceived how much scope for the display

of that kind of talent this play afforded, and she felt to the greatest degree provoked that this pale girl, who seemed scarcely able to articulate, should persist in retaining a part which would have so peculiarly suited herself. Mrs. Wyndham was also annoyed, though she did not venture, after all her previous solicitations, to urge Ginevra on the subject; but she expressed great fears to her brother that the exertion would be too great for her; he anxiously questioned her about it, but though she persisted in denying it, and tenaciously persevered in her determination to act, he could not but observe that she was looking very ill, and that the usual gravity of her countenance had a shade of deeper sadness in it than usual. If Mrs. Fraser in the midst of her provocation, or Colonel Leslie in the midst of his solicitude, could have read into that young heart during those days of silent suffering, they would both have started and wondered that aught so young could be so sad. When after that rehearsal scene she found herself alone, she two or three times waved her arms above her head, as if to dissipate the weight that seemed to press on her brain, and then clasped her hands in earnest supplication.

"Send an angel to comfort me," she murmured;

and doubtless her prayer was heard, for tears came to her relief — tears that fall like rain on the parched ground; and words too, which relieve the pent up spirit, burst from her lips in the solitude of her chamber — broken, incoherent, checked by sobs, without precise meaning — but yet with power to relieve. Who knows not the value of those secret out-pourings?

"Edmund, will you come to me? Edmund, will you return to me?" she murmured. "I am so weary, so lonely, so frightened sometimes. I am so afraid *of* you — I am so afraid *for* you. O, if I dared, I would flee away, and be at rest. There are homes where I might lay my head, and never cross your path again. But I may not shrink from the struggle. Oh, that woman! Anything but that — any trial but that. Bound to me for ever — bound to me by ties he hates, perhaps, and cannot break — and my silence, my ignorance, my fears — it is too much — the cross is too heavy, the burthen too great!"

She lifted up her head: the sun was sinking obscurely bright among the dark clouds that seemed assembled to receive him. It was the sunset-hour, when every knee bends in her own land as the vesper-bell floats over sea and plain from every lofty spire and

convent tower. She recited the sacred but familiar words, and with them peace returned. Long and earnestly she prayed. She prayed for strength to do her duty, that simplest and most sublime of all prayers, whether it points to the commonest self-denials, or to the most heroic sacrifices. He that hears that prayer, and gives that strength, knows alone where it is most needed, — for He alone can judge of the merit of those sacrifices to which the world so often renders much more or much less than justice. Pale still, but patient and calm, Ginevra left her room, and joined her father and her sister. With that perfect simplicity and earnestness of character which was peculiar to her, she reproached herself for having neglected to do her best at the rehearsal of that morning, — at having allowed her own sufferings to interfere with the satisfaction of others — and it would have been touching to any one who could have known how sore and bruised that gentle spirit had been that day, to have seen her take up that manuscript, the very sight of which was painful to her, and con it over like a child its lesson, while now and then she disentangled Margaret's knitting, or raised her eyes from her work to smile at Colonel Leslie, who since the morning hat watched her with

anxious tenderness. She observed this, and it gave her a motive for exertion. She went out early the next morning, and ascertained from a priest, whose chapel she was in the habit of visiting, that the vessel which was to bring Father Francesco to England was expected to sail from New York in the course of a few weeks. This welcome intelligence revived her courage, and she returned to her enforced gaieties, her harassing suspense, and her perplexing task, with spirits refreshed and energies renewed.

CHAPTER V.

Two or three days before the one that was appointed for the representation in favour of the Spitalfields weavers, Walter Sydney arrived in London, and made his appearance one morning at breakfast in the little drawing-room of Colonel Leslie's house. Margaret gave a start when he entered the room, and a look of sincere pleasure spread over her face as she welcomed him. There was, however, in her countenance and in her manner something anxious and restless, which did not escape his notice. He attributed it to excitement and fatigue, and merely sighed for the time when they should all return to the country, and leave behind them dust and balls, smoke and private theatricals, all of which seemed equally repugnant to his tastes. He was the most perfect town-hater in the world. The smells, the sights, the sounds, were positively painful to him. His eyes smarted, his limbs ached, his feet swelled under the influence of the smoky *atmosphere*, of the smooth hot pavement, of the pale *sun by day*, and the bright gas-lights by night. All

the varieties of deformity and of misery which haunt you on every side as you pace along the streets, affected him painfully; and the contrast at every moment exhibited between the extremity of abject suffering on the one hand, and the height of pomp and luxury on the other, irritated him into a state of pugnaciousness which he seldom experienced in the country. He really hated London as other people hate an enemy; and he very nearly quarrelled with Ginevra, who maintained that a great city has a poetry of its own, which makes its way to the heart of those who are alive to its influences, and that this dark, foggy, smoky, gloomy, busy London, lays a strong hold on the imagination of those whose minds keep silent watches, in the midst of that wild maze of thought and of action which carries them along with its powerful tide.

"Elsewhere we carry on life: in London life carries us on," she said with a jaded look, as if she was willing to roll swiftly down that silent but ceaseless stream, which is called Life. Walter looked at her, and only said —

"Whither?"

"Aye," she replied hastily, "nothing signifies but *that. The current is* swift, but the end is sure."

"And you are going to act to-night?" he said, absently, as if musing on the strange contrast between her state of mind and her present pursuits.

"All life is acting," she replied quickly, and her lip quivered.

"Hush!" she said, as he was about to answer — "do not speak to me, dear Mr. Sydney. I have need to be calm, and I am calm, but not enough to analyse the nature of my own feelings, or to discuss them with you. I am so glad you are come, for Margaret's sake."

Walter looked at Margaret, who was reading a letter which had been placed in her hand a moment before. She seemed much interested in its contents, and he had to speak to her twice before she answered him. At last she looked up, and as he was proposing to her a walk, she told him that she was engaged to be with the Vincents at twelve o'clock, to practice some duets with them, and begged him to escort her to their house. He assented, and they proceeded along the park towards Piccadilly. Her bag fell from her arm, and as the letter she had just received escaped from it, Walter's eyes rested accidentally on the signature, which he saw was Frederic Vincent.

"May I read this letter?" he said, with a smile.

"No, Walter, not yet," she replied in a serious manner. "I may have to speak to you, in a few days, on a subject connected with that letter: it is one of great importance to us all, but I would rather not enter upon it at present."

A sudden paleness spread over Walter's face, but he did not say a word, and she spoke of something else, and thus they crossed the sun-burnt, bot, and dusty grass towards Hyde-Park-corner. Now and then, she pressed his arm kindly, and said —

"Dear Walter, it is such a comfort to have you here," or, "I am so glad you are come at last;" but his silence embarrassed her, and neither of them felt at ease with the other. At last, as they drew near to Lord Donnington's house, Margaret said, in a hesitating manner —

"Are you coming in?"

"No!" he answered abruptly. "Ginevra fetches you away in the carriage, you know."

The door opened.

"When shall I see you again?" Margaret said, in a low voice.

He was gone without having heard her question, and wandered into Kensington Gardens with a mind

ill at ease, and greater difficulty in looking the future in the face than he had ever yet experienced. Ever since his conditional engagement with Margaret, he had struggled with himself and endeavoured to keep his mind prepared for the alternative which he himself had insisted on leaving to her. He had told himself, that he was prepared for the result; — but who is ever prepared for affliction? — to whom does it not teach a new lesson? — to whom does it not reveal new secrets? Walter had often said to himself, when Edmund Neville was preferred by Margaret, that his own sufferings were the result of doubts as to Edmund's character which made him tremble for her happiness. This was true to a certain degree, and, perhaps, if at that time she had transferred her affections to Frederic Vincent, he might have mistaken the comparative relief which this would have produced for contentment; but now the cup of bliss had been held to his lips — the future had passed before him with all its visions of love and happiness, and to forego it all at once and for ever, without a right to complain, without the relief of a reproach or a murmur, was a task which even the most exalted heroism of affection writhed under, though it did not shrink from it. He sat on one of

those old wooden benches, left for a moment vacant by the tribes of nurses and children that were strolling about, and pictured to himself his next interview with Margaret, and the necessity there would be to appear resigned, contented, calm — to listen to her communication, aye, to encourage her to make it, to reassure her doubts, to dispel her scruples; and he felt afraid — of what? that he should reproach her bitterly for the cruel manner in which she had trifled with his happiness, holding out and then drawing back from him the bliss of his whole life, as a child offers in sport, and then detains the plaything of the hour? — was he afraid that he should give way to complaints, and to upbraidings? — No; he was afraid that she might perceive, that she might guess, how wretched she had made him; that his voice, his face, would betray the extent of his disappointment.

"She corresponds with him, I suppose," he said to himself, and a flush passed over his pale thoughtful face as the idea crossed his mind, "to consult him how she may break the matter to me — how she can best explain what a mistake she made in thinking she loved me. I will make it all easy to her. She shall have no confessions, or explanations to go through. She

looked so anxious this morning, so unlike what she was at Heron Castle." He thought of that day, that hour, when her arms had been round his neck, her cheek wet with tears, her voice broken by her trembling emotion, and his courage for a moment gave way. When he crossed the park on his way back to his hotel, he saw her in Lady Donnington's carriage, Lucy Vincent at her side, and her brother opposite to them. They passed close to him without seeing him, the string causing some delay near the Serpentine. Margaret was listening to Frederic Vincent with the most earnest attention, and seemed quite absorbed in her conversation with him. Walter watched the last fluttering corner of her veil as the carriage disappeared in the distance, and then proceeded, with a more determined step, to his lodging, and shut himself up for some hours, desiring the servant to deny him to every one, without exception.

During the next days, Margaret's engagements were very numerous, and although she endeavoured to see Walter whenever he called, and her manner to him was as affectionate as ever, he could not divest himself of the impression that she was altered to him, and his own manner, in consequence, was so depressed and

nervous that it reacted on her's, and a feeling of embarrassment, for the first time in their lives, sprung up between them. Under the belief that she was about to inform him that, according to his own suggestion, she had proved her own heart, and that it had not stood the test of absence and change of scene, he did not venture to express in words, and scarcely in his manner, the love which was overflowing in his heart, and which even jealousy could not embitter. Margaret was fond of admiration, and what homage can the world produce equal to that which she had been used to from Walter? the constant devotion, the unfailing tenderness of such an attachment as his, threw into shade all the flattery of ordinary admirers. But Walter was not the same in London as he had been at Grantley, and she asked herself with anxiety, if the change was in him or in herself. She grew provoked with what appeared to her his coldness and reserve, and in an unfortunate moment resolved to pique him by an appearance of equal indifference. Nor was this line of conduct merely passive; she flirted with others, and confirmed, by her manner, the suspicions he had already formed. Disappointed and vexed, she could not adopt at once the tone of friendship which he successfully

maintained at the cost of many a secret struggle. These struggles she never saw, nor did she guess at the deep current of feeling and of suffering which flowed under the surface of his habitual calmness. Estrangement imperceptibly rises in the heart as the gathering clouds gradually steal over the surface, and obscure the brightness of a serene sky; and thus it was rising between two hearts, in one of which, at least, there was nothing but affection, devotion, and an utter renouncement of selfish hopes and objects. But his reserve appeared to her like coldness, and she was not sorry that he should see the admiration she excited in others, and feel a little anxiety to retain that place in her affections which she had so freely granted to him. Frederic Vincent was, for many reasons, her most frequent and acceptable companion in Walter's absence, and sometimes even in his presence, when she wished to excite his jealousy, and to provoke him into showing it. It never entered into his mind to suppose that she could doubt the sincerity of *his* affection, and, therefore, any display of this kind only impressed upon him the belief that she repented of her engagement, and that it was his duty to release her from it, with as little pain to herself, and as much self-command on his part, as the

circumstances of the case would admit of. On the evening before the play, she had pursued, more than usual, the line of conduct which led to this result, and Walter determined to leave London with as little delay as possible. He spent the next day in painful uncertainty regarding the manner of his departure, and the way in which he should announce it to Margaret. Towards seven o'clock in the evening, he received the following note from her: —

"DEAREST WALTER,

"We called at your door, in the carriage, twice, and found that you were not at home. We wanted you to have dined here with Ginevra and me, before the play. My part is nothing to-night, and I have only to walk in and out of the stage in the second piece. I mean to see the first in comfort, and I send you a ticket for our box. You *must* see Ginevra act. She seems low, but not nervous. I do not think she cares much about it; but she is not well, and I feel anxious about her. Do come. Your most affectionate, "MARGARET."

The clock struck eight, and Ginevra was waiting for the end of the overture, and the rising of the cur-

tain. She had never felt less agitated in her life; at the same time that she was conscious she could get creditably through her part, she had no constitutional shyness, and no anxious vanity to disturb her. Edmund's absence weighed heavily on her mind. She had hoped, to the very last, that he would have had a wish, an interest, a curiosity — some feeling, in short — connected with her appearance on that night. Had *he* been among the audience in that crowded little theatre, she would not have sat so calmly awaiting the signal for her appearance. It was at last given, and she advanced on the stage, while the house rang with applause. The last words that had been uttered previous to her entrance were these — "*You will find the gaiety, which report has given to Miss Milner, softened by her recent sorrow to a meek sadness, and the haughty display of charms imputed to her manners, changed to a pensive demeanour.*" Ginevra's attitude and countenance answered so well to this description, that the applause redoubled, as she raised her eyes to Sir Charles d'Arcy, who was acting the part of Dorriforth,*

* In the French play from which this drama was reproduced, Dorriforth, Miss Milner's guardian, is not, as in the novel, a Roman Catholic priest, but a Knight of Malta, bound to celibacy by the rules of his order, not by any solemn religious vows.

and kneeling to him for a moment, promised in a trembling voice, to obey him as her guardian and her father. And now the noise subsides, and the play proceeds.

Mrs. Wyndham, pleased with the *début*, fears that the next scenes will want the animation which that sprightly dialogue and that rapid action demand. Margaret bends forward in her place, as if she would have flown upon the stage if she could, to excite the spirits of her sister, who looks pale through the artificial colour on her cheeks, and who moves languidly when she ought to be sprightly. Colonel Leslie withdraws to the back of the box, and unconsciously tears to pieces the play-bill in his hands. It is Ginevra's turn to speak—the prompter has given the word, there is a pause—she begins a sentence, and stops. Margaret's breath is stopping too. Colonel Leslie changes colour, they look away, they look again; she is speaking now, and what a change has passed over that pensive face, that languid frame? What light is beaming in those eyes — what smiles are playing on those lips — what animation reigns in every gesture, in every motion, in every glance! "*Miss Milner has regained that vivacity and all those airy charms whose* transcendent power

had been absorbed for awhile by the influence of sorrow." She looks at Dorriforth, and an expression of the keenest sensibility marks her countenance. The passion of a mistress, and the tenderness of a wife, are in that glance. She flirts with Lord Frederic, and there is a gaiety, an arch simplicity, a restless animation in her manner, in the quick turn of her eye, and in the rapid delivery of her answers. She persecutes Sandford, her inveterate and stubborn adversary, with an unrelenting flow of wit and feminine animosity; and when she laughs, and Mrs. Horton, with an enraged voice and aspect, prays heaven to forgive her for laughing, she laughs on, as if nothing could stop that outburst of gaiety, that exuberance of youthful spirits, which plays in every feature of her face, which resounds in every accent of her clear voice. The audience applaud and applaud again, and she laughs on; she cannot stop, she is overpowered with the humour of the moment, with the gaiety of her heart.

"What an actress! How she acts!" is whispered in the pit, in the boxes, in the galleries. The first act ends, the curtain falls, the applause continues.

"How can you sit on, like a stone, Neville, when that girl is enough to drive one mad? Did you ever

see anything so captivating? D'Arcy is desperately in love with her No wonder, for they have been rehearsing together, morning, noon, and night, for the last three weeks. *Il en est fou — ou le serait à moins.*"

If Edmund Neville's neighbours wished to drive him mad, they could not have held a more fitting discourse. His cheek is pale with anger. The demon of jealousy is busy at his heart, and these remarks are adding fuel to the flame. She has not answered his letters — she has disregarded his requests, his entreaties, against her acting — she has cast him off, and the ties which he has refused to acknowledge, have ceased to bind her conscience. He blames, he condemns, he despises her — he thinks her religion might have taught her better. He forgets everything, but that he loves her still, and that she loves him no more. He darts out of the orchestra, where he had found a place just as the play was beginning — he makes his way to the green-room; she is standing by Sir Charles D'Arcy — she is bending over a book, and with an animated expression, she is explaining to him the manner of pronouncing a particular sentence. He learns it from her, and he says with an intense expression of feeling,

"*I am transported at the tidings you have revealed! and yet, perhaps, it would have been better if I had never heard them.*"

She rewards him with a bright smile, and says with an accent of indescribable gaiety —

"We shall succeed to-night. All will go well to-night!" and she leads the way towards the stage, as if impatient to appear there again.

Edmund turns away with a feeling of rage in his heart, and mounting the narrow stairs that lead to the stage boxes, he enters Mrs. Fraser's box, and is warmly welcomed by her; he seats himself in the very centre of it, and with her fan in one hand, and his head resting on the other, he watches the curtain rise, with a storm of vindictive resentment boiling in his breast. Ginevra is discovered alone, her eyes are fixed upon the ground, and a slow smile plays over her face as she utters these words: "*Are not my charms even more invincible than I ever believed them to be?*" She raises them and glances at the corner of the orchestra; ever and anon throughout the next scenes she directs her eyes to the same spot, and each time with a more anxious expression; and now, during an interval between two sentences, she casts a timid

glance towards the boxes and perceives Edmund sitting by Mrs. Fraser in an attitude which indicates the attentions of a lover. She trembles, her limbs seem to sink with her, a cloud dims her sight. She cannot act with this fear in her heart; with that sight before her eyes she cannot rouse herself — she dares not look again in that direction — she presses her hand on her heart to still its beating, and the while, deafening bursts of applause ring through the house. Again and again they are repeated, and she stands for a moment confused and bewildered. "Go on now, go on," is whispered around her, and the prompter begins the sentence that she must utter. "*The part which I undertook to perform*," he whispers; she catches the sound, and in a voice that thrills the audience by the passionate energy with which it is pronounced, she exclaims: "*The part which I undertook to perform is over; I will now for my whole life appear in my own character, and give a loose to the anguish I endure.*" Fresh bursts of applause ensue, for there is a wildness and a tenderness in the inflections of the young actress's voice, and in the expression of her face, which elicit transports of enthusiasm from the astonished spectators. The scene is drawing to a close, the hands

of the two principal actors are joined together, and the curtain prepares to fall; Ginevra glances at the ring which has been placed on her finger, and shudders.

"Did you see that? Did you observe it?" is whispered through the house by all those who are acquainted with the "Simple Story" in its original form. Did you see that; did you observe it, Edmund Neville? Have you too remarked that strange piece of acting. Have your eyes met her's as the curtain descends between you? You have, and you can scarcely restrain the impetuous impulse which is hurrying you to her side. You start when Mrs. Fraser touches your arm and claims your attention; but you dare not move, for Charles Neville is by your side. He has been haunting your steps and watching your movements — he has been gazing alternately on Ginevra and on you, and when, pale with anger and with jealousy, you turned away from the door of the green-room, he was there with his stiff scrutiny and his mute investigation. The second piece begins, and in one of the opposite boxes, pale, dejected, like a bruised lily, between her father and Walter Sydney, sits Ginevra. The audience have recognised her, and the

murmurs of applause rise again to greet her. The scene is for a moment suspended, and Miss Leslie's name is vociferated with enthusiasm. She shrinks back, then bending forward, bows and withdraws. Colonel Leslie wraps a shawl around her, and she leans against him for support. She gazes on Edmund as if her soul would force its way to his, through that long and earnest gaze, and with a mute supplication she calls him to her side. He leaves the opposite box, and a flush of pleasure tinges her pale cheeks. She watches every sound, she counts the seconds by the pulsations of her own heart, — she hears a step, she sees the handle of the door turn — she cannot draw her breath, the expectation is so intense. Walter rises to open the door, and Charles Neville enters. She bursts into tears, she can no longer feign or struggle, and the disappointment is too much for her worn-out frame and exhausted spirits. "Father, take me home," she murmurs, as Colonel Leslie almost carried her away. And when she had reached her home, and the door of her room had closed upon her, when she is alone, she says again: "O Father, take me home!" This time it is to her Father in heaven that she speaks, and the house she prays to reach is not an earthly home.

Meanwhile, Margaret has been performing successfully her slight part in the afterpiece, and has gone on to Mrs. Wyndham's, where the *corps dramatique*, and some of the audience, had assembled to supper. Mrs. Fraser seemed to breathe more freely, now that the time was come for shining herself, instead of admiring others. Self-possession, and an immense fund of good-humoured impertinence, the most difficult weapon to guard against, or to withstand, were her chief advantages in conversation. She had the rare power of talking nonsense without appearing silly, and of insulting people without transgressing in the least the rules of good breeding. This talent she exercised amply that evening, and the shafts of her satire flew right and left, and some, *not* at random sent, fell on Ginevra, the heroine of the night. Some remark with regard to the sequel of the frail Miss Milner's history, which some one present wished to be dramatised, drew from her an ingenious reply, in which it was gently insinuated that the sequel might, perhaps, find its place in real life, if not on the stage. Margaret, whose presence had escaped her notice at that moment, turned crimson, and by a strange instinct looked at Edmund Neville. He was deadly pale, with what

kind of emotion she could not devise; she felt frightened at the expression of his face. Some one present, who was unaware of her relationship to Ginevra, took up Mrs. Fraser's remark in a sneering tone, and was stopped by an explosion of such passion, that it startled all the bystanders, as if an electric shock had touched them. None knew exactly what had been said; there had been a muttered oath, and a few unintelligible words pronounced, and then a dead silence had followed, and for a few instants, Mrs. Fraser seemed subdued more from excessive surprise and bewilderment than from intimidation. As to Margaret, her resentment was swallowed up in wonder and emotion at that new chink which seemed to open upon her, and to let in light on the subject of her investigations. Soon after the party broke up, and she passed through the first drawing-room without seeing Walter, who was sitting at a table near the door, examining an album, with that apparent attention, and entire absence of mind, which belongs to an absorbing pre-occupation. He had been seated by her side during the exciting performance of that evening; her manner had been kind and affectionate. Once, in a moment of anxiety about Ginevra's acting, she had

put her hand in his, and during the last affecting scenes, she had turned to him with an expression of countenance, which had revived his hopes, and almost overcome his composure. Unable to endure the suspense between his recent fears, and his renewed hopes, he whispered to her during an *entr'acte* —

"You said this morning, Margaret, that you would have something to confide to me. Is it —"

"Oh, yes! dear Walter," she interrupted, with an appearance of great emotion, "something of importance, but which I cannot speak of yet. I do not feel sure enough. — I could not bear to say it, while it may still be all a mistake. But soon, very soon, I think —" and at that moment her eyes were turned towards the part of the house where Frederic Vincent was sitting, and before she had finished her sentence, the entrance of another person into the box interrupted the conversation. From that instant, the music sounded discordantly in Walter's ears — the lights seemed to hurt his eyes — the close atmosphere to stifle him — the noise of voices about him to produce a sensation of pain, and all the energies of his being to concentrate in the effect of concealing that pain.

The next time Margaret spoke to him, there were

strangers between them; he answered just as gently as usual, but there was a slight alteration in his voice. When, after the supper, which had followed the play, Margaret passed close to him without being aware of his presence, he was resolving in his mind the incidents of that evening, and endeavouring to draw from them some final conclusion. A few moments afterwards, he heard her voice in the door-way, and in an opposite looking-glass he saw that she was speaking to Vincent. "I have something to tell you," he heard her say in a low voice: "And I have a letter to show you," he answered, in the same tone. The next words escaped him, but an instant afterwards he heard her say in a tone of great feeling, "O Frederic! you cannot think how anxious and unhappy I sometimes feel," and then there was some muttered answer, and a movement in the next room, and he heard no more. But he had heard enough to make him resolve on his own course. Speedily he revolved in his own mind the past and the present, and determined to withdraw silently from the position in which he was placed, without giving her even the pang of an explanation, or the embarrassment of an avowal. He meant to leave London at once, but, to return to Heron Castle, to Grantley Manor, and to

his poor mother, was beyond his strength; and he asked himself whither he should go. When the young and the happy ask themselves that question, it is one of the most joyous of soliloquies; one of the brightest of their communings with the free and eager spirit within them; but when in affliction, in deep dejection, under severe disappointments, we ask ourselves "Where we shall go," then the heart pities itself, while it seems to mock, by the vain question, its own utter desolation. Walter had asked himself two or three times that evening where he should go, when Mrs. Wyndham's only son, a youth of eighteen, who was about to set off for Paris on the next day, proposed to him in the most earnest and cordial manner to go with him. A gleam of pleasure that shot through his mother's eyes at the suggestion, enforced the request. With all the anxiety of maternal solicitude, she had seen her son about to travel abroad alone, and had so entirely failed in her efforts at opposing the scheme, that this new suggestion filled her with delight. Without pledging himself to it, Walter half agreed to the proposal, and when he reached home that night, he wrote the following letter to Margaret: —

"I do not know if you will be surprised at the

sudden change in my plans, my dearest Margaret, or feel disappointed that I do not remain to receive the communication you promised. The fact is that, for yourself and for me, it is far better that I should not stay in London. You know, dearest, how I love you, but you cannot know how anxious that love makes me, or how much I reproach myself for the errors into which my affection and anxiety lead me. I will not attempt to conceal from you, that it has not been without a painful struggle that I have come to this decision, nor pretend that I shall not suffer in carrying it out; but, at the same time, I am sure that you will hardly believe how faint were the hopes I cherished that the dream of Heron Castle would ever become a reality. It brightened for a while the solitude of my destiny, and cheered the tedious hours of sickness and suffering. They have faded away, and life has reassumed its former aspect — not quite its former aspect — but as much of it as is needful for the patient endurance of the present hour, and the accomplishment of present duties. I wish to leave you free, not only free from constraint, but free from embarrassment. I go for a short time to Paris, and when I return, you can call me Old Walter again, as in former days, and tell me all your secrets,

as if we had never had one of our own. I am glad to have that secret to keep in my heart, dearest Margaret. It shall be the romance of my life, the source and the centre of all the deep emotions of my soul. I know that you have a true affection for your first, your oldest — may I say, your *best* friend? I know you well enough to believe that rather than cause me pain, you would come to me to-morrow, and once more bind yourself to me by kind words and generous promises, and therefore it is that I go, and without seeing you again. I know you too well, thank Heaven, to suspect you of any coquetry or any unfairness towards me or towards others. What I have seen with my own eyes, and heard with my own ears, and what your own words have given me to understand, is enough. Heaven bless you, dearest Margaret. Heaven reward you for all that you have been to me since the days of your infancy, up to this hour, in which I bless you with the same fervour, and the same freedom from selfish hopes and fears and regrets, as when I stood by your cradle, some twenty years ago. When the doubt that still hangs over your future fate is solved, write to me without any misgivings. Remember, that to tell Old Walter that you are happy, is to make him so; though

his joy may seem to himself and to others like grief, it will be great as his love for you, and nothing can be greater. And now, farewell, and God bless you, Margaret Leslie. I have said much, but not all I feel about you and for you. Your most affectionate,

"WALTER."

"P. S. — I start with young Wyndham at an early hour to-morrow. Give my love to your father and Ginevra. Write to me about her; how beautiful but how ill she looked last night!"

Tired with the exertions and the excitement of the previous evening, Margaret slept till past twelve o'clock on the next day, and when she woke, and saw several letters lying by her bedside, she stretched out her hand, and drew Walter's from among them, with a feeling of wonder at its size and apparent length. She opened it, and started with surprise at the tone and the tenor of its contents. She was disposed to irritation; several circumstances had combined to annoy her; and this misunderstanding (if, indeed, misunderstanding there was), exasperated her to the greatest degree. Tears of vexation stood in her eyes. Walter was gone *without seeing her*, and placed her under the painful ne-

cessity of writing an explanation which she was particularly desirous of making (if indeed she made it at all) by word of mouth, or of leaving him under an impression, which she scarcely knew how to define. There is no doubt that we are apt to judge the conduct of others with peculiar severity when we are secretly dissatisfied with our own, and that to be provoked with those we love distorts our understanding as much as it disturbs our peace of mind.

Nervous and irritable from fatigue and excitement, Margaret resented Walter's conduct, as if it amounted to an insult. She went almost into a passion, spoke (luckily she was alone and spoke to herself — what nonsense people talk to themselves sometimes) of his absurd jealousy, his ridiculous suspicions; recollected that after all it was she who had originally proposed to marry him — she actually turned crimson at the thought, but there was more of resentment than of modesty in the emotion. She suggested to herself (without in the least believing it) that he was a regular old bachelor, and did not want to marry at all, and was seeking to find a pretext for giving her up. She *said for* the next hour, to herself and of him, all the *most disagreeable* things she could think of, and then

felt a little relieved, and by degrees a smile passed over her face. Perhaps she was glad to be released, and then she read his letter again, and a tear, a bright round tear, glistened in her eye, and then stole down her cheek — perhaps she was forgiving him. In another hour's time she was at her writing table, and this note was written, sealed, and sent to Paris: —

"It is your own fault if you choose to give up our schemes of happiness. I am not going to propose to you a second time, for I begin to think you would be a sort of Bluebeard in modern dress. I should be always watching for the key, or, like another Anne Boleyn, laying hold of my neck to make sure that my head was still upon my shoulders. You are grown so very flighty, Old Walter, that it is difficult to keep up with you, both literally and figuratively. You take a crotchet into your head, and fly off to Paris like a lover in a novel. To think of *my* having to scold *you* for rashness, and precipitancy, and thoughtlessness! It is rather pleasant to turn the tables upon you. I do not know what *you saw with your own eyes*, *and heard with your own ears* (it must have been something very dreadful *to have* sent you rambling over the world in

this hair-brained fashion), but as to *what my own words gave you to understand*, your comprehension was decidedly at fault, and your journey to Paris quite superfluous. When you want to solve this riddle, you may come here again. Did you really think that your little Margaret was going to give you up? O dearest Walter! if truth, and honour, and love were banished from the world, I should know where to seek for them — not in the hearts of kings, as the French monarch fondly deemed, but in a heart that I am proud and happy to claim as my own, by right of birth, Old Walter, and by right of conquest, too. When you can decently abandon your travelling companion, come and *see with your own eyes, and hear with your own ears*, that I love you as dearly, more dearly, than ever; and help me by your counsel to attain an object which, next to your affection, is dearer to me than anything else in life. Ever, dear Walter, your most affectionate

"MARGARET."

Owing to some mistake in the direction, this letter did not reach Walter till long after it was written, and in the meantime we must, in another chapter, follow the progress of Ginevra's history.

CHAPTER VI.

It was the day after the play, and a hot July afternoon. Margaret was lying on the sofa, quite exhausted with heat and fatigue, when she raised her eyes, and observed that Ginevra was dressed to go out.

"Where on earth are you going, this broiling day?" she exclaimed, tired at the very idea of stirring.

"To Lady Mordaunt's breakfast," answered her sister, without raising her eyes from her book. "Mrs. Wyndham will call for me in a moment."

"I could as soon fly across the Park as go with you," Margaret returned, while she bathed her own head and hands with Eau de Cologne. "And you ought not to go," — she continued, raising herself on the cushions, and observing the almost transparent whiteness of Ginevra's complexion, and the dark shade under her eyes.

"I must go," she answered quickly, "I have promised."

"*Whom?*" Margaret asked.

"Myself," she replied; and her sister saw that there were tears in her eyes.

"Oh, Ginevra, take care what you do," she cried, for a vague fear connected with Neville's return seized her at that moment, and she gazed on her with an almost frightened expression. "Ginevra," she said, timidly, "remember that my father — your father — loves nothing in the world but you; remember how much he has suffered, and that if you —"

"O Margaret, in mercy!" — The pale girl clasped her hands together, and then raised them to heaven with an expression of such intense supplication, that her very attitude was a prayer in itself. "Do not try to stop me," she said hurriedly, "for I *must* go."

"Ginevra," cried Margaret, starting to her feet, and throwing her arms round her, "Ginevra, you are not going for — for ever."

"O no, dearest, no! Be calm, Margaret, I am not going to leave you. It would be better for you if I was. I have thrown a dark shade over your life. I know it — I feel it — but I never will steal away from you like a culprit. I will speak, before I leave *you, sister.* Do no be afraid," she added, and her

brow contracted as she spoke; "I have no home, no hope on earth, no refuge, but your love."

At that moment a loud rap at the door announced Mrs. Wyndham's carriage, and her voice was heard on the stairs. She was come to persuade Margaret to go with them, but she vainly urged it, and was obliged to content herself with carrying off Ginevra. In the caleche, was seated Sir Charles D'Arcy, whose eyes lighted up with pleasure when he saw her, and whom she greeted kindly. Her mind was so absorbed in one subject, that she had not had leisure to observe his devotion to her. She had not the slightest idea that he was supposed to like her, or that his attentions were generally remarked and commented upon. Margaret was aware of it; but in all that concerned Ginevra, she felt as if treading on delicate and dangerous ground. If she suggested to her too soon the necessity of seriously considering the nature of his sentiments or of her own, she might possibly be interfering prematurely in an affair, which, under certain aspects, and under certain contingencies, might turn out to be highly desirable, and, also, whenever at the beginning of their stay in London, she had, seriously, or in joke, alluded to the *admiration Ginevra* inspired, or to the attentions that

were paid her, she had invariably seen an expression of indescribable annoyance on her sister's face, which had induced her to abandon the subject. Ginevra's manner had therefore been constantly courteous, kind, and free from all constraint in her intercourse with Sir Charles, whom she liked as an acquaintance, and, latterly, had grown to consider almost as a friend. He was very much in love with her, but his manners and his character were essentially English, and therefore, to one who, like her, was little acquainted with society, and whose ideas of love were derived partly from books — but chiefly from the vehement expressions and emotions which had attended the course of Neville's romantic courtship, and passionate devotion to her — the placid and calm interest which was evinced in her welfare, the quiet watchfulness which marked the attentions of Sir Charles D'Arcy, and the deep but concentrated expressions of feeling which escaped him, did not convey any notion of the real nature of his sentiments, or warn her from encouraging them by marks of preference which she naturally showed to one for whom her esteem was great and her regard sincere.

This conduct on her part, joined to the emotion *which some casual* expression sometimes caused her —

to the agitation which he had sometimes noticed in her manner and in her countenance, without being able to assign it a cause — had given him hopes that she reciprocated his attachment; and on the preceding evening he had confided these hopes to Mrs. Wyndham, and intreated her to interest herself in his favour. To be made the confidant in an affair of this kind was one of the happiest incidents in her life; and actually to be the chaperon on the occasion when a proposal might be anticipated, almost turned her head with joy and excitement. Her great object in persuading Margaret to go to the breakfast had been that she might have conversed incessantly with her as they drove to Rosewood, and have thus left the lovers, as she designated them already, in peace and comfort on the opposite side of the carriage; but this scheme failing, she vainly sought for some mode of suppressing herself altogether — of annihilating herself for the time being. She would have liked to *faire la morte*, like her own spaniel, or to have been for an hour —

"In second childishness and mere oblivion."

But it would not do; she could not offer to shut her eyes and her ears, or go to sleep or read the "Court

Guide;" the two last expedients she attempted, but it did not help on matters; and in this unsatisfactory state of mind she remained till they reached Rosewood, and joined the numerous groups of people who were already assembled on the lawn.

A band of music was playing in one place, some Swiss peasants singing in another, children dressed as children should not be — that is, so smartly, that they ought not to tear their clothes; and yet scampering about happily, doing exactly what they should not have done, with their lace frocks and gauze bonnets — were running round and round between people's feet. Girls were sitting talking as if talk was the business of life; and men standing about, as if to be bored was the inevitable condition of humanity, from which they sought no refuge and no escape. Some mothers, anxious about their daughters' parasols being up and their veils down; others pursuing their younger offspring through bushes and beds of flowers; some full of hopes and schemes, others full of weariness and heart-sickness; some anxious about themselves or curious about others; a few enjoying themselves in the pure air, in the gay scene, with the joyous music and the romping children — happy in the sight of happiness, and confronting

with their radiant smiles some of those careworn visages —

> "As rich sunbeams and dark bursts of rain
> Meet in the sky."

In a moment Ginevra was surrounded by a tribe of children, among whom the little Vincents, some of Lady Donnington's youngest boys, were foremost.

"Oh, Ginevra," exclaimed a little fellow of six years old; "come pull off your bonnet, and put on your scarf in that queer way in which you used to wear it at Genoa."

"Oh, yes," cried a little girl; "and do sing us that funny Italian song."

Ginevra tried to escape, but children (*les enfants terribles*) are unmerciful, and she was forced upon a garden chair, her bonnet removed, and her scarf presented to her with earnest entreaties that she would put it on. She complied with a smile, and with one child on her knee and the others crowding round her, she repeated in a low voice a few stanzas of the comic song they asked for.

"Louder," cried the little tyrants; and "louder" was repeated by the older spectators that had also assembled round her. The children were delighted, and

one little thing climbing behind her tried to put a garland of roses on her head, but the flowers fell to pieces, and the scattered leaves flew about her. There was one gazing upon her at that moment, who remembered the Casa Masani and the first day in which he had seen her playing also with children and roses. Alas! he had stolen away the youthfulness of her spirit — the roses of her life — and planted many a sharp thorn in her path. He had made sad havoc in her life, and in his own too. Was he not suffering more than herself in that instant? Who can tell? Who can decide upon the acuteness of sufferings they have not felt — upon the capabilities of suffering, in natures so different?

Edmund Neville had been standing on the steps of the house at the moment of her arrival, and had heard the various observations which had been elicited among the bystanders by Sir Charles D'Arcy's appearance in Mrs. Wyndham's carriage.

"Is not that Miss Leslie and her *futur?*" asked one person, spying at Ginevra, as she was getting out of the carriage.

"*They* are not engaged yet," answered another.

"But ought to be, at the rate they are going on," retorted the first speaker.

"She is pretty enough to be fastidious," said a third.

"Will she have him?" asked a fourth.

"She is a great flirt if she does not like him," was replied.

"He has been *à ses pieds* for the last three weeks, and the other day one could see that she acted her part *con amore*."

Edmund had not seen the rehearsals of that play; he did not know what sudden emotion had given rise to the vivacity and the tenderness with which those exciting scenes had been rendered, and which had formed such a contrast to the languor of her previous attempts, and these careless observations renewed the jealous pangs he had endured at the time. He had stood behind her in gloomy silence while she sung, and her eyes had vainly wandered over the lawn, and towards the house, in search of him. Her aunt came up to her at that moment, and proposed to walk round the grounds. She readily consented, in the hopes of *thus meeting Edmund*, and taking Sir Charles D'Arcy's

offered arm, she followed Mrs. Wyndham, who had prudently secured a companion for the occasion.

After crossing a parterre, which divided the lawn from a wood beyond it, they entered the conservatory, and the smell of the orange flowers drew from Ginevra an exclamation of pleasure, which was instantly succeeded by so deep a sigh that it excited the attention of her companion. He spoke of Italy, and she bent her head over the white blossoms to conceal the tears that filled her eyes. When she raised it again, Mrs. Wyndham had disappeared, and Sir Charles D'Arcy's countenance was unusually animated. He was looking at her with an indefinable anxiety, and when she turned towards the door, he detained her by pointing out a fountain, whose mimic showers watered the neighbouring plants. Before she had ceased admiring it, he had twice begun a sentence which he abruptly terminated. There was something in the expression of the pale gentle face he so much loved, that failed to give him courage; but he was not a man that gave way to nervousness beyond a certain point. He had made up his mind to speak on that day, and in that hour, and he did speak. His words were manly, *honest, kind*; perhaps more earnest than ardent, more

tender than impassioned; but he grew eloquent by degrees, and no woman could have listened unmoved to the avowal of such an attachment. It was so true, so deep, so real, it carried conviction to the mind — it honoured her and himself. She was taken by surprise; could not, did not interrupt him. He gathered hope from the circumstance, and looked into her face; tears were rolling down her cheeks. Her emotion transported him; he took her hand. She did not withdraw it abruptly; she disengaged it gently; and then, with a deep sigh, regained her self-possession, and said, simply and earnestly,

"This should never have been; and if I can hope that you will forgive me for any involuntary encouragement I may have given you, it is that I believe you to be too generous to reproach me for an error — too true yourself to suspect me of want of truth. I did not know that you loved me, that you had ever felt for me a stronger interest than that of kindness and esteem; such an interest I must *always* feel for you, Sir Charles, but *never* can feel any other."

"Why so deeply moved, then?" he exclaimed, unable to reconcile her emotion with the decisive tenor

of her words. "Is it pity for me that makes you weep?"

"No!" she said in a very low voice; "it is myself I pity, not you."

"Ginevra!" he said, eagerly, "do not forbid me to hope."

"Hope!" she repeated, with a look of perplexity. "Hope! I implore you to put away all idea of love for me, if you would not make me miserable. You cannot be too strongly assured that it would be wrong and vain to indulge such a thought."

"Wrong it cannot be, to love you; vain it may be; but that is a question for my own heart to decide. You cannot reproach yourself, Miss Leslie; you have spoken plainly enough. I shall not thrust upon you the expression of an attachment which offends you; but in secret you cannot forbid me to cherish it, and, till the day that you marry another, I shall never cease."

"Oh! do not say so," she interrupted with agitation.

"Is it, perhaps," he continued, with sudden animation, — "is it on account of my religion that you reject me?"

She shook her head; but he persisted.

"Remember, that your attachment to your own faith, that your fidelity to sacred duties and sincere convictions, would be to me the surest ground of my confidence, the greatest claim to my respect, and the warrant of my own hopes for time and for eternity."

Each word that he uttered seemed to mark the contrast between *his* conduct and feelings, and those of Edmund Neville, and to bring before her the picture of her wrongs and of her trials. She could hardly subdue her emotion, or reiterate with sufficient calmness her refusal — her entreaties that he would overcome an affection which she could never requite; and, when on his repeated prayer that she would at least tell him if her own were engaged she assented at last by a brief monosyllable, and turned her burning cheek away from him — she almost felt as if she had betrayed Edmund and made a fatal admission.

At that moment she saw her husband standing at the opposite door from that by which she and her companion had entered the conservatory — his face as pale as a sheet, and his eyes flashing with anger. She sprung forward as if to join him, and then recollecting, with a bewildered feeling, the peculiarity of her situation, *she turned towards* the other door. Sir Charles

D'Arcy followed her, and they rapidly crossed the flower-garden, in the direction of the lawn. When they reached it, the band was playing a waltz, and dancing was going on. She looked out anxiously for Mrs. Wyndham, but trembled so much that she did not venture abruptly to leave the arm of her companion. In a moment Edmund was by her side; he offered her his arm, as if they were engaged to dance. She took it in silence, and they stood among the crowd. Suddenly a voice at his elbow said,

"You do not waltz — what are you about?"

It was Mrs. Fraser who spoke. Then Ginevra felt that they flew swiftly round and round, in the midst of that crowd, to the sound of that loud music, and she scarcely knew if what oppressed her heart and her brain was joy or suffering. His arm was round her waist, and her head was gradually sinking on his shoulder.

"Stop!" she said; and they drew back and pierced that crowd, and still he dragged her along, without speaking, down a long shrubbery walk, and across a wood, till they reached a small temple, built in the Italian style, which stood at the end of a vista. Edmund *darted within* it and closed the door, bolting it inside.

The coolness of the atmosphere revived her. He had let go her hand, and was standing opposite to her with his arms folded, and his countenance lowering with speechless anger. She clasped her hands, and exclaimed —

"At last! — and thus!" and then, rising with impetuosity, she stood before him, and raising her head proudly, returned his glance; and in hers there were such mighty upbraidings, such overpowering reproaches, so eloquent in their silence, so strong in their mildness, that he faltered under its speechless influence, and exclaimed —

"Ginevra, you can break my heart, but not bend my will. You may plunge us both into despair, but you shall not pursue your course unmolested. Do not imagine that you can brave me in every way, or that I will not sacrifice everything in the world, rather than endure the silent humilitation of the last few days — your name in every mouth! — your shame proclaimed aloud! Aye, your shame, though the world knows it not, and into my very ears instils the poison of its slanders. Did you imagine I should bear this, and tamely acquiesce in my dishonour and in your's? To *my face, this very day*, displaying with audacity —"

The colour rushed to her face; a storm was gathering on her brow; a torrent of recrimination was rising to her lips; a woman's insulted, wounded, goaded feelings were struggling for mastery, and well nigh burst all barriers, and broke through all restraints; but she paused, and prayed for patience, and with a strong hand kept down that rising passion, and, with an effort of more than human virtue, pleaded for herself. *She*, the victim to the tyrant, the deserted wife to the jealous husband! Oh, what a relief to the oppressed spirit it would have been to defy, to threaten, to upbraid, to take a haughty stand on the ground he had assigned her, to brave his anger, to scorn his threats in his presence, even if her own heart should afterwards break in his absence! But there was a word stamped upon her brain, engraved upon her heart, which passion could not efface, or anger obliterate. *Expiation* was that word; and it brought her to his feet, not to plead guilty to his charges, but to accuse her own ignorance, to entreat his indulgence, to implore his guidance, and then, with her eyes fixed upon his face, and her hand clasped in his, to wait for his *next words*, as if her sentence of life or of death turned *upon them*. And now was her worst trial — now her

guardian angel must support her — now the saints in Heaven should pray for her — for Edmund has drawn her to his breast, and his heart is beating against her's, and his eyes are fixed upon her's with unutterable love; and that voice, which she has so often in her solitude pined to hear, is pouring forth into her ears words of passionate affection, of ardent supplication, and when she attempts to speak, he closes her mouth with kisses, and draws her still closer to himself. He pleads, he reasons, he holds the cup of bliss to her lips, he tempts her by every art, he scares her by every fear. She grows paler and paler as the fierce conflict lasts, and then suddenly leaving his side, she stands before him, and says —

"What is it you forfeit by acknowledging your marriage? Is it money?"

There was no scorn in her voice or in her face as she said this. She spoke the words clearly and distinctly, and fixed her eyes upon him with a look of piercing interrogation. He turned pale with anger, then crimson with shame, and then sternly calm, as he replied —

"I have pledged myself, by assuming my present *position, not to acknowledge* a marriage with a Catholic.

Such an avowal *now* would cover me with dishonour, and take it out of my power to fulfil the most sacred engagements."

"The most sacred engagements!" she slowly repeated; "you talk of sacred engagements! Heaven forgive you, Edmund, for you make light of your's to me — or of mine to God!"

She laid her hand on his shoulder, looked in his face, and said in a low and impressive voice —

"Edmund, how you would despise me, if I yielded to you."

He looked up hurriedly; these words had given him a faint hope; but yet his heart, strange to say, almost sunk within him at the perception of her supposed weakness.

"It would be a proof of love, my Ginevra, for which I should bless you —"

"For an hour or a day," she exclaimed; "and then — Edmund, life is too short, eternity too long, for such a sacrifice. Leave me — leave me; I cannot endure this trial much longer. I love you, and I make you miserable. I would give my life for you, and I embitter your's; my wretchedness can scarcely be more *complete.*"

"Go," said Edmund, gloomily; "go, and tell your family — go, and tell that crowd of people yonder, that you are my wife. Then, at least, no insolent admirers will dare, for a while, to address you; and if they ask what is become of your husband, you may tell them that he is ruined, dishonoured, and undone, through you, and by you —"

He stopped, and gazing upon her with a mixture of love and anger, suddenly burst forth —

"And are there no duties, then, in your eyes, but such as you use against me? Was it right to defy me — to resist my positive commands, when I had charged you not to appear in public, or to act with that man, whom all London calls your lover? Is your fidelity to your creed, the cover for such moral transgressions as these? And are you conscientious only when your scruples drive a dagger into my heart?"

"Edmund," she exclaimed, with a bewildered expression, "I never received such a command from you. For weeks, I watched — I longed — I pined — for a word from you, and, day by day, woke with hope, and laid down in disappointment. Oh! dearest — dearest Edmund, believe me; I have never wilfully offended or *disobeyed you.*"

"No, by all that is sacred, you never have!" he cried in deep emotion, and snatched her to his breast. "You are an angel, and I am a fiend. But those letters — I sent them as usual to Carafelli!"

"Edmund, *he* died three months ago. I thought you knew it. His poor wife told me you did. And your last letter was so — so stern — that I thought you had cast me off for ever."

A sound of voices startled her: she turned very pale.

"We shall be seen!" she said, and trembled violently, "and then you or I shall be undone."

The sounds subsided, and he said abruptly —

"Have you made your choice?"

"What choice can I make? My fate is in your hands."

"You do not intend, then, to proclaim your marriage?"

"Is it in mockery that you speak thus, Edmund? Can you suppose that I would accuse you to others, ignorant and helpless as I am? No, I will be silent; at least, as long as a hope is left me that you will relent, and yourself —"

"You are willing to return to your home, then, and to your present mode of life? It is gay enough,

no doubt, and you have Sir Charles D'Arcy's devotion."

"This is too much, Edmund; this is more than man should inflict, or woman can endure. To cast me off like a discarded mistress because I stand between you and your wealth— and then to accuse me falsely, and turn my very patience into a crime—was there ever a woman so used, a wife so insulted? Go, Edmund, leave me now. You have filled the measure of your wrongs by that sneer, which you will remember one day with remorse. Let me go. You shall not detain me here."

She pushed open the door, sprang down the steps with a rapidity which took him by surprise, and disappeared from his sight in an instant.

He stood gazing on that darkening avenue as if the light of his existence had passed away, as well as the light of day. He adored Ginevra, and long ago would have braved all the misery of disclosure, if the spirit of suspicion and jealousy had not taken possession of his mind. His character was naturally inclined to harbour this spirit; and the strange circumstances of his married life had tended to foster these bad qualities. From the moment that Ginevra's religion presented an

obstacle to his views, he had persuaded himself that if she really loved him, she would yield to him a point which, in his eyes, appeared of secondary importance; and which, unprincipled and governed by passion as he was himself, he could not conceive should keep its ground against such love as she professed to feel for him. This was the source of all his bitter reproaches, of his ceaseless persecutions. This was what armed him against her tears, and excited him almost to madness, when he supposed that she willingly acquiesced in her fate. Strange to say, that much as he warned and threatened her against disclosing their marriage, he sometimes felt indignant and angry that she did not assert her claims, and proclaim herself his wife. Great as had been his despair at the prospect of losing his inheritance at the time of his father's death, and fearful the embarrassments into which that loss would involve him, this feeling, at times, almost merged in his irritation at what he supposed to be her coldness and indifference to himself, and his own want of influence over her — for it was thus he qualified her unshaken firmness in adhering to her religion. When one of these feelings for a time subsided, the other gained ground. He tried her feeling by absence, by an osten-

tatious flirtation with a coquette; and he heard of her in London, surrounded, and admired, and apparently contented with her fate. He returned to England, and found her the object of what were considered serious attentions, and acting in a play where the very man who excited his jealousy, performed the part of her lover. At that moment he would have been willing to forego fortune, reputation, everything, either to be reassured or revenged; but when she had justified herself, and that in her face, and in her words, he discerned the love that she still bore him, his old feelings returned, and he again, with a strange perversity, strove to terrify and force her into compliance. When she left him in indignant resentment at his suspicions, he, by turns, accused her and himself — would have given worlds to recall her—and yet felt conscious that if he did it would only be to renew his persecutions.

It was late in the evening before he made his way back to the house, which was brilliantly lighted, and where dancing was going on. He gave a hurried glance round the room, and saw Mrs. Wyndham in the act of putting on her shawl, and Ginevra standing by her with a sterner expression in her face than he had ever seen in these fair features. Sir Charles D'Arcy

was near them, and when "Mrs. Wyndham's carriage stops the way," was shouted by the servants, he offered her his arm, which she took without speaking. There was another delay, and they all stood in the hall. Neville placed himself before her; but though she had seen him, and that the arm which rested on Sir Charles's trembled, she did not once again turn her eyes towards him. He bit his lips till the blood started from them; he spoke to Mrs. Wyndham in a hurried manner, and with a wild laugh. He grew almost frantic at her silence. He said between his teeth,

"You will drive me mad if you go on in this way."

Whether she heard him or not, she did not stir, and sprung into the carriage without a word or a look. It was all over then — she had finally discarded him. He had offended her beyond forgiveness, insulted and injured her, till she, the gentlest, the mildest of women, had grown to hate and to despise him. All would be over between them. She had seen how others would have loved her, and she had at last recoiled with loathing from the man who had marred her destiny, and blighted her existence. Now, what would it avail if he was to acknowledge his marriage

— offer her to share the beggary of one whom she had ceased to love — confess to her proud father, that he had deceived, tortured, and injured his child, and now could offer her no reparation, but his dishonoured name and his broken fortunes? A few months ago she would have braved everything for him — would have worked, toiled, begged for him. Yes! she *had* loved him with a deep and patient love; she had borne her trials with an heroic and much enduring tenderness, but it was over now; he had drawn upon it too largely, he had dealt with it too roughly, the cord had snapped, and the spell was broken. Now, if he acknowledged his marriage, what was to become of him? Scorned by his own family and by her's, a separation would inevitably ensue; or if that religion which he had so long striven to drive out of her heart by every art which his passions suggested, and his violence carried out — if it made her pity and forgive him — what did he care for such feelings, if she did not love him? What cared he then for life with or without her? What strange visions rose before him during that night, of what might have been, had he followed the paths of truth and of honour! — what dark presentiments of what now would be the

tenor of his days! He thought of her as he had seen her in her Italian home — a child in form and face — an angel of light and beauty — he thought of her as she had stood at the church door on the day of their first parting, and felt again her soft hand on his burning brow, as she had spoken of courage and of hope. Again he saw her pale face flushed with indignant surprise, or cold as the ice which the blighting north wind has fixed on the deep lake. And then, in days to come, how should he see her? — bound to himself by hateful ties, every feeling bruised, every hope withered — would she die in her youth, and go down to her grave in darkness and in sorrow? — or would she live, and fall deep, deep into the pit which his own iniquity had dug under her feet? — would her eye one day grow bold, and her brow shameless? — that pure eye, that lofty brow, that noble spirit, that spotless innocence which had won his love, and commanded his respect, through all the heavy trials of their married life. If she should ever fall into guilt, would not her fall weigh on his conscience like a damning curse, and the memory of her lost virtue haunt him to the day of his death like a menacing spectre? What could save her, he bitterly asked him-

self, if, hating and despising him — her husband and her betrayer — she stood in the world, with her youth, her beauty, her warm heart, and her ardent spirit, unguarded by sacred ties, unprotected from unhallowed affections, and with a life before her unbrightened by one ray of hope or of love? "What can save her?" he repeated with agony; and then he thought of her religion — her firm, ardent, uncompromising religion — that religion, against which the winds of human passion had beaten, and the waves of affliction had broken in vain — that religion, to which she had clung through the storm, and which had carried her through it with an unshaken fidelity, and an unsullied purity. He thought of her own solemn words, "Life is short, eternity long;" of her deep faith in the value of suffering; and for the first time he rejoiced that her feet were set upon a rock, far above the billows in which his own restless spirit was tossed to and fro.

After nights of sleepless thought, Neville passed days of restless uneasiness. He went to every place where he thought it possible that Ginevra might be, but he saw her not again, and Sir Charles D'Arcy at the same time disappeared from the world. Once he saw him walking through the park, arm in arm with

Colonel Leslie; and another day, as he was himself wearily pacing up and down Park Lane, with his eyes fixed on the house inhabited by his wife, he saw D'Arcy standing at the drawing-room window. Day after day he sat down to write letters to Ginevra, in which he sometimes upbraided her for her coldness — sometimes entreated her forgiveness, or offered to acknowledge his marriage, if she would promise to cling to him through all the difficulties that would ensue; but his pride revolted, his feelings recoiled from asking or accepting a sacrifice from her. Her strict sense of duty would doubtless make her agree to any self-abnegation, which such a course might require; but to accept instead of conferring an obligation — to humble himself at once before her, as well as before his injured sister, and perhaps read in her face, on the very day that he drank his cup of bitterness to the dregs, and found himself despised and condemned by the world, that same cold and stern expression with which she had parted from him, and which had haunted him ever since — the idea was intolerable, the prospect insupportable. Their positions seemed reversed and their parts exchanged. His impetuous nature writhed under the sense of her indifference, and the possibility of her

love for another. It was reported in the world that she was attached to D'Arcy, and that there were only obstacles to their marriage which time might surmount. The probability of their union was often mentioned before him. Her paleness, the mournful expression of her eyes, her sudden retreat from the world, were commented upon, and Neville grew almost frantic with the fears, the doubts, the suspense, the conflicting and daily renewed agitations of such a life of misery. Sometimes he plunged into dissipation with reckless avidity; sometimes, with the hope of terrifying her into some measure of reconciliation, he displayed to the utmost his intimacy with Mrs. Fraser, and encouraged the reports which were again circulated of his approaching marriage with her. He hoped they would reach Ginevra's ears; and even if she had ceased to love him, even if she cared for another, she must be roused by the bare apprehension of so dreadful a crime, so horrible a deception. In this turmoil of passion, in this conflict of feeling, his nights and days were spent. He sometimes left London for days and weeks together, and shut himself up occasionally in complete solitude in a villa which he had taken at Fulham.

One morning, after a night of more than usual

misery, he rose with a resolution which had suddenly been formed, and which gave him calmness. He would go straight to Colonel Leslie's house, ask for Ginevra, desire to speak with her alone, put her love to the test, and his own fate in her hands. He had now nothing to fear, nothing to lose. The riches, the possessions of the world had turned to dross in his hands; the respect, the good opinion of men, were as dust in the balance. Her love, her fidelity, her pardon, were all in all henceforward, and he would put it to the test in that day to lose or win it all. With rapid steps he crossed the streets between his house and Colonel Leslie's; he drew near to it, and perceived that it was shut up. A sickening sense of disappointment oppressed him, but he hurried on and knocked at the door. A housemaid opened it; he asked where and when the family had moved.

"They are gone abroad, Sir!" she answered, with a curtsey!

"Gone!" he repeated, as if scarcely understanding her.

"Yes, Sir! The colonel, Mrs. Wyndham, and the young ladies. It was very sudden, Sir, their going,"

she continued, seeing that he neither answered nor moved.

"When do they return?" he said in a hoarse voice.

"I don't know, Sir."

"Where are they gone?"

"Can't tell exactly, Sir! They did not seem for to know till they got to Dover if they should go through France or Belgium." He turned away.

She was gone. She had left England without making one effort to see him — without writing him one line — without making the slightest advance towards a reconciliation. It must be a settled resolution, a deep and irreconcilable hatred and contempt that possessed her — he felt it. The sea was now rolling between them, an emblem of that deep gulf of separation which had divided their hearts for this life.

"Aye, and for another too!" he exclaimed, fiercely, "for I will curse her and die. She has been cruel in her anger, and merciless in her revenge. No, I will not die," he continued, clenching his hands. "I will not die; for she would then marry that man, and forget that I had ever crossed her path — that I had ever been anything to her but a tempter, a tyrant, and a foe!"

For hours he wandered, for hours he strove with his misery, till his rage had grown dull, and his grief hard. Towards dusk he went into a club, he took up a newspaper — among the departures for Dover, he saw the names of Colonel Leslie and of his family, and of Sir Charles d'Arcy. A cold, dark, hopeless anger took possession of his whole being. He cursed his wife, his rival, and himself. He went back to his house, at one moment resolved for ever to drive her from his mind and from his heart; at others, to pursue her — to tear her from her father's arms — overwhelm her with a torrent of reproaches — and vent, in her presence, the fury and the tenderness, the remorse and the passion, of his soul. But by degrees that fierce storm subsided, and his trust in her returned. The sacred ties which bind them will plead his cause, even in the eleventh hour of returning faith, in the last lingering light of her departing love. He thinks of other lands, of other cares, of honourable toil, of generous efforts. His imagination gradually admits new ideas — a new order of things — a new plan of life: but he has not yet dived into his own heart, or measured its deceitfulness. Jealousy and disappointment, fear and remorse, have opened his eyes; but they have not

shaken to the very foundation the evil depths of his heart. If, in that hour, Ginevra had stood before him in her gentle beauty — if, in her eyes, he had seen that same meek, enduring, much-pardoning love, he had so often found there, may be the evil spirit would have returned into the chamber of his soul, with seven spirits worse than himself, and the last state of that man might have been worse than the first. But the ground is softened, the spirit is moved, and Edmund Neville is a different man from that day forth. This is the turning point in his life. If he hardens his heart now, he will soon be a villain — one of those villains who are content to despise themselves, and become indifferent to their own baseness. A few months more of hardened selfishness, a few months more of heartless deceit, and his love for Ginevra will have died away in the foul atmosphere of his degraded mind. And if she loves him still, it will be that her eyes rest on the painted sepulchre that hides from her sight the loathsome corruption within. *Will* he harden his heart? What hope is there that he will not? Will Heaven strive for ever with a man? Will God knock at the door of his heart?—knock in vain, and never depart? Does not a day come when He says to the soul, as

his prophet to the guilty king of old — "Thou shalt see my face no more!" Doubtless there are such days; but ere that last sentence goes forth, the vials of wrath are sometimes in mercy emptied, and the soul is shaken to its very foundation, and the spectres of the past rise from the tombs of memory, and the veil is rent in twain, and discloses eternity, and in the hour of nature's agony the soul surrenders to its Maker — the spirit yields to its God.

CHAPTER VII.

It had never been difficult to Ginevra to forgive Edmund, till the day that they had met and parted at Lady Mordaunt's breakfast. To be at once disowned and upbraided, to be driven almost wild by threats on the one hand, and by sneers on the other, — her silence insisted upon with violence at one moment, and made the very ground of suspicion on the other, — was more than even the gentlest spirit could endure; and as she drove home on that night, she was on the point of rushing to her father's room, confessing the whole truth, and calling upon him to protect and defend her against the world and against Edmund. But her conscience whispered, that she would be doing from resentment what she had not done from a sense of duty. Not that it had ever appeared to her in that light, or that she had resisted the suggestions of conscience; for, whether love and timidity had deceived her, or else that in fact she was right to try every means to obtain justice from Edmund himself, rather

than extort it from him in the face of an hostile world and an indignant family, she had hitherto pursued her course in the strong conviction of acting rightly, in the firm belief that she had sacrificed nothing but her own peace of mind — her own happiness — to him whose honour and welfare were dearer to her than life. Still, if it had never been her duty before, his injustice and harshness did not make it one now, and she reproached herself for the passing impulse which had prompted her to an act which passion, and not principle, had suggested. Margaret seemed involuntarily relieved when she returned, and held her cold hands within hers, with more than usual tenderness. It was late, and the weather had grown somewhat chilly. Colonel Leslie was sitting by a bright sparkling wood fire which had just been lit. Ginevra placed herself near him, and then laid her aching head against his chair, as if unable to bear its weight. He gently raised it, and pressed it against his breast. The long dark eyelashes were resting on the marble cheeks, on which the light of the fire threw a slight reflection, and every vein in the transparent forehead was discernible. She had removed her bonnet, and her comb falling at the same time, the masses of her fair hair rolled over his

arms. She was very beautiful in that attitude, but there was something about her face that made her father and her sister uneasy. He looked at Margaret and shook his head; she burst into tears. Ginevra suddenly opened her eyes, and looked from one to the other with a frightened expression. She glanced anxiously at Margaret, and began to talk with a forced gaiety. The clock struck twelve, and Colonel Leslie wished both his daughters good night. He kissed Margaret on the forehead, he pressed Ginevra to his heart, and they withdrew. The sisters slept in two rooms next each other, the doors were open between them, and Margaret sat reading in her's, while she watched for the measured breathing which would indicate that Ginevra was asleep. She saw the light extinguished, and all was still, except that now and then a low suppressed moan seemed to reveal some kind of suffering. Gently, and with her lamp shaded by her hand, she advanced towards the foot of her sister's bed. The unnatural brightness of her eyes startled her. Ginevra made an almost joyful exclamation when she saw her, and beckoned her to her side. Margaret placed the lamp on the floor, and sat down on the edge of the bed. The hand that rested on her's was

burning hot, and her cheeks, that were so pale an hour before, were glowing like fire.

"Margaret," she said at last, raising herself in her bed, and looking steadily in her eyes, "I am so glad you have come to me, for I should not have slept to-night if you had not, and I do want to sleep, Margaret, my head aches so much. I got frightened down stairs, when I saw that my father was looking at you, and that you were crying. I felt it was about me, and it made me afraid."

"Afraid of us, Ginevra!" Margaret said in a soothing tone.

"Afraid of what might happen," she answered hurriedly; "afraid of to-night — to-morrow. Listen to me, Margaret. You think that I am ill, don't you? You are uneasy about me? O, my sister, shall I tell you what terrifies me — what makes me ill? It is the fear that pity and kindness will make you reveal what pity and kindness have hitherto made you hide. Margaret, it would kill me if you did. It kills me to think you will."

She grasped her sister's hands, who maintained a grave and painful silence.

Ginevra became pale again, and said with great agitation,

"You will break my father's heart, and mine too, if you speak to him."

"Will the time come when you will speak yourself, Ginevra?"

She paused a moment, and then said earnestly,

"I must pause, and in solitude question my own thoughts, before I can answer you. But this rest assured of, Margaret, that you cannot be wrong in trusting me."

"Aye! *you*, but not *others!*" Margaret exclaimed, while her eyes flashed with indignation. "You are dying by my side, and you hold me back when I would save you."

"Sister, I know not what you think," Ginevra rejoined, "but this you may believe. There is no safety for me but in following what I believe to be my duty, and in sparing my father a trial which might kill us both. How much or how little you know of me and of my history, I know not, — perhaps I may never know; but this much I will tell you: The crisis of my fate is approaching, and, as I said before, it is in prayer and in solitude that I must meet it. Doubts have risen in my mind which never rose there before,

and I seem to have lost the track which, narrow as it was, once appeared so clear. When this happens to a Catholic, Margaret, this is what he does. For awhile, if he may, he withdraws from this perplexing world, and communes in deep silence with his own soul and with God. In one of those calm retreats where the light of eternity shines on the paths of this life, and the still, small voice of conscience is discerned by the hushed spirit — he listens to that solemn message, and returns to the world like Moses from the mount, ready to break the idol, or to offer the sacrifice that Heaven requires. This is what I am about to do: far from those I love and those I fear, alone with my God, and those who speak in His name and with His power, prostrate at the foot of the cross, I will ask in deep humility what He will have me to do, and *that*, so help me Heaven, I *will* do, though it should be — sister, what I have prayed against from my childhood upwards, to bring misery on those I love, and pour fresh bitterness into a cup already but too full. Now, dearest, go and sleep; and if in the night you wake with tears in your eyes, remember that they are blessed, for you have wept to-night with one who weeps."

"Sister, good night," Margaret murmured; and

then she threw her arms round Ginevra's neck, and kissed her with all the fervency of the affection which filled her heart, and then returned again to smile upon her, while tears gushed from her eyes; and then, when those wearied eyes were closed with fatigue, she gently fanned the glowing cheeks till their crimson hue subsided; but she started and hurried away like a frightened child, when, in the midst of the broken murmurs of the sleeper, the name of Edmund passed the fevered lips, and was repeated with a heart-rending accent, which sent the watcher to her own room, pale and trembling with a nameless fear.

Ginevra was better the next day, but unequal to any exertion, and she seemed now to dread as much going into society as at one time she had appeared to seek it. Mrs. Wyndham had imparted to her brother, with many expressions of surprise, annoyance, and almost indignation, the refusal which Sir Charles D'Arcy's proposals had met with. When he was made acquainted with it, he immediately connected with that circumstance Ginevra's emotion on her return from Rosewood, and the subsequent evident alteration in her spirits, and conjectured that she had sacrificed her inclinations, either to some scrupulous sense of duty,

or, perhaps, from a mistaken idea that she was called to a monastic life. But when he broached the subject to herself, the calm decision of her manner seemed to remove such an idea; and the solemn assurance she gave him, that though desirous of making a temporary retreat in a religious house near London, which she named, that she had no vocation for the cloister, and no intention of embracing a religious life, satisfied him on that point, though it still left him at a loss to account for the evident depression of her spirits. Early in the morning she would ask Margaret to go with her Kensington Gardens, and remain an hour or two sitting in the shade, or, if the sun was not very hot, basking in the sunshine: for an unnatural chilliness seemed to affect her; her step grew every day more languid, and her voice more feeble. She sometimes asked Margaret to read to her, and generally chose such books and passages as spoke of sufferings endured and sacrifices made for conscience sake. Sometimes she tried to read herself; but her cheek flushed, and her hands trembled too much, and she gave it up after going through a page or two. Yet all the time she was not ill, or did not acknowledge herself so. She fixed on a day for her removal to the convent at —, and Mar-

garet, who, since their conversation on the night after the breakfast at Rosewood, had connected this retreat with the final solution of her sister's destiny, heard it proposed and assented to with a mixture of nervousness and satisfaction. She also thought it might be good for her health, which was evidently failing in a way which no physician could understand or prescribe for. She had often witnessed the extraordinary effect which religious services and places seemed to have on Ginevra's spirits, and wondered at, without quite understanding that power. Often and often she had seen her weep in solitude, and only find relief at the foot of the altar; and rejoiced that for awhile she was to be within constant reach of that little quiet chapel where a lamp burned by day and by night, and at stated hours the solemn accents of prayer arose from prostrate worshippers. She could imagine how soothing would be to her this unwearied round of service in that humble dome, and almost longed (though she could not on many points believe like Ginevra) that she might share for a while her retreat from the glare and turmoil of life. Perhaps she needed it as well as her sister. She was not as calm, as tranquil, as she ought to have been. Oh, what a weary, restless,

breathless thing youth is! How few can lie or rest on their oars, even for a few days, while youth is still at the prow, and pleasure at the helm!

One day that Ginevra seemed less fatigued than usual, her father persuaded her to go and dine with a friend of his, who had a villa in the Regent's Park. There was to be some music in the evening, and he pressed her very much to make the exertion. She consented, for Margaret was engaged elsewhere, and she saw how anxious Colonel Leslie was that she should go. Mr. Elvers was a lawyer of great reputation, and his house was very much frequented by old judges and young barristers. The society at dinner that day was almost entirely legal, and Ginevra sat at dinner between a learned member of the bench and a young man who had been just called to the bar. It was refreshing to her to see a set of wholly new faces, to hear no allusions to the set of persons with whom she had recently associated, and she conversed with her neighbours with more ease and cheerfulness than she had experienced for some time past. There are moments of strange relief to all suffering, mental as well as physical, and this Ginevra now experienced. One of her neighbours interested her very much by

accounts of various strange trials, which had come under his notice during a late circuit, and her earnest attention and intelligent remarks rivetted him to her side during the rest of the evening. She was sitting by the window, and two or three other persons joined her and her new friend, and the conversation became general. After discussing with some animation a case of poisoning they adverted to the subject of a disputed property in the county of Essex, and Mr. Ausdon, Ginevra's new acquaintance, eagerly maintained, that under the terms of the will, on which the question turned, there could be no doubt of what the verdict would be. Some one questioned that the words were correctly quoted, and in support of his superior acquaintance with the exact tenor of the will, he mentioned that he had been to examine it at Doctors' Commons, "where, by the way," he added, "I read through that strange will of one of the Nevilles of Clantoy."

"What will?" asked Mr. Ausdon.

"That will by which the only son is disinherited if he marries a Catholic."

"So much for Protestant liberality," said Mr. Ausdon.

"O! on that score," replied the other, "the Papists themselves have no right to complain."

A young man, who had not yet spoken, passed his hands through his hair, gazed at the opposite looking-glass, and said,

"O! I know that Neville; the son, I mean; he is a capital fellow, but very extravagant. He ran through as many thousands as he had lived years, before he came to the estate. It was reported that he had married a Catholic abroad."

"What did he do with his wife, then — burked her somewhere, or gagged her?" said Mr. Ausdon.

"No, no; upon my word, that's all nonsense. I have known him all my life. He would not do a shabby thing."

"Shabby!" said the gentleman who had seen the will; "you might as well call a man's picking your pocket shabby. It would be a downright fraud."

"Why, it serves his father's purpose if the Catholic wife is suppressed."

"But there is a sister, my dear Sir; a sister, whose right to the estate would, in that case, be good in law, *though you* may think it founded on a most abominable *injustice.*"

"O, there is a sister in the case, is there? A Miss, or a Mrs. somebody?"

"Miss Neville; a very amiable person, I am told, who will be well worth looking after if this invisible wife should ever turn up."

"Well, I declare, I think it would be too much to except of him that he should ruin himself by acknowledging his marriage; but, if it really is true, how he must have bullied the wife to keep her quiet!"

Mr. Ausdon looked rather contemptuously at the last speaker, and, turning to Ginevra, said,

"Can you imagine, or excuse a man, keeping such a secret under such circumstances?"

It was impossible to her to speak; she turned abruptly away, and at that moment the first notes of a loud bravura interrupted the conversation, and with her arm resting on the back of the piano-forte, her head on her hand, and her eyes fixed on the singers, as if she was rivetted by their performance, she revolved in her mind the new impression which that hour had conveyed to her mind.

"A fraud! a fraud!" she repeated to herself, as if weighing the value, the meaning of that impression. "*His sister defrauded.* His name disgraced. Oh, those

words! I understand them now — Silence! ruin! dishonour! Lost if I speak, aye, and lost if I do not speak! Debts, difficulties! I to overwhelm him, I to denounce him, I who would die for him! Oh! how art thou fallen, my beloved, my Edmund! His trial has been great. Would to God I had died! Heaven forgive me, I never said so before; but a fraud! a crime! Oh, I cannot sit here and think of it, and not grow wild with the thought: and he is gone, gone! I cannot find him, I cannot find him. I know not where to find him, and I am getting so ill, my brain at times feels so confused. If I write and others open my letter, they will know, they will discover —: and I too have been silent, I have helped to defraud his sister — his sister. Edmund's sister, could I but see you, could I go to you! And what shall I say? That Edmund, my Edmund — O, he has told me so, he has not deceived me there. If I speak he will fly from me; he will go for ever, for ever. And what am I that I should be his judge? — that I should drive him to despair! No, but at his feet I can lie, and not let him go till he has cast to the winds all worldly fears, all worldly wealth, *and from that shipwreck saved nothing but his honour and my love.* Then we may fly together, then we may —"

At that moment Colonel Leslie touched her on the shoulder, and she perceived that the song had been long ended, and that the company was dispersing. From that day she seemed to grow much stronger; she became less pale than she had lately been. There was usually now a bright colour in her cheek, and she took a great deal of exercise again. At all hours of the day she walked or drove, and Margaret observed that she watched continually, with a kind of feverish anxiety, all the groups of horsemen that they passed; that she often stretched her head out of the carriage to look down a street, as if she would pierce the distance in search of some object; that she set out on their daily drive with a heightened colour, and returned to her room at its conclusion jaded and exhausted, and that once or twice she had been out alone in the morning. On these occasions she had gone to Mivart's Hotel, where Edmund usually staid when in town, and found that he was still in the country, and had not named any day for his return. Since she had learned the real cause of the secrecy which he had observed and imposed upon her, she felt resolved to procure at all cost another interview with him, and not to leave him till *she had obtained* what now was no longer a boon to

herself, but an imperative claim, which in the name of honour, of truth, and of justice, she must plead, and if she failed — her brow contracted with anguish, but her *will* was firm — she would then speak out herself, unless Heaven in its mercy sent her death before that day.

On her second inquiry at the hotel, she found that Edmund was expected there in about three weeks' time; and on that period she fixed all her thoughts and feelings — all the intensity of her hopes and her fears. About a fortnight before this epoch, she found one morning her father and her sister reading a letter, which had appeared to affect them painfully, and which was placed in her hands, while Colonel Leslie stood musing, with his back to the fire, in a thoughtful attitude, and Margaret sat gazing on the park with a mournful expression of countenance. It was from Walter Sydney; he had left Paris a short time before, and had proceeded with young Wyndham to Switzerland, intending to return home by the Rhine, while his companion proceeded to Italy. But, at a small town near the Lake of Lucerne, the latter had been seized with a violent attack of illness, which presented such alarming symptoms, that Walter, who had summoned the best me-

dical assistance the neighbourhood could afford, was obliged, after consulting with the doctors, to write home, and request that Colonel Leslie would break to his poor sister the fearful intelligence, and urge her to set off at once, if she wished to see her son once more. He immediately felt that it would be impossible to let her go alone, and he resolved to accompany her as a matter of course. His only doubt was about his daughters. He felt a strong desire to take them both abroad, but he was afraid that Ginevra, in her delicate state of health, would not be equal to the fatiguing day and night journey which they would have to perform, and he therefore yielded without difficulty to her desire of accomplishing her retreat in the Convent of —, where she was, at all events, to have gone in a few days. To Margaret he left the choice between this hurried and melancholy journey, and a visit to her grandmother, at Grantley, which had been for some time in contemplation. He proceeded himself with a heavy heart to carry the intelligence which was to turn the thoughtless gaiety of his poor sister into the bitterest grief that human nature can know — the greatest trial it can experience; to say, "He whom thou lovest is suffering — *he who is far from* thee is dying," and to carry her

through the scenes of this busy world and its unsympathising surface of beauty, of business, of sunshine, and of shade; a throbbing heart whose every pulsation is pain — to which every bright ray of light is a mockery, and each human face it meets, a careless witness of its speechless woe.

Margaret sat at the window with her eyes fixed on Walter's letter, and, overcome by some sudden emotion, she pressed it to her heart. What that emotion was, it would have been difficult for herself to define. That she was agitated was certain, and differently from what the news of the dangerous illness of her cousin would have accounted for. The troubled expression of her dark blue eyes spoke not merely of grief or sympathy, but of perplexity. Had she been playing with edge-tools, and while Frederic Vincent and herself had been seeking to unravel the secret that hung over her sister's destiny, had her heart or her vanity imperceptibly betrayed her? How this strange confidence between them had sprung up, neither could scarcely have said. Vincent had known, since the days when he and his family had been at Genoa, that there was an acquaintance between Ginevra and Neville. He *had strongly* suspected, the day that Maud and him-

self had surprised her in conversation with a stranger, who that stranger was; but his knowledge of his sister Maud's spiteful disposition, and of her peculiar antipathy to Miss Leslie, had induced him altogether to suppress his suspicions. Subsequent circumstances confirmed his belief, and since his return to England, he had watched with interest the indications which seemed to throw light on the subject. The words he had heard Margaret mutter, on the night of Lady Tyrrel's party, (about Edmund's *acting* more parts than one) suggested the idea that she suspected him of double dealing with regard to her sister and herself; and almost involuntarily that night he touched upon the subject, and asked her if she had any reason to suppose that Edmund and Ginevra had been acquainted in Italy. She was taken by surprise, and he immediately saw by her countenance that the idea was not new to her. Having been friends from childhood, Margaret was disposed, at all times, to treat him with confidence, and she knew him to be honourable and high-minded, to a degree which inspired her, in this particular instance, with a strong reliance on the correctness of his judgment, and the delicacy of his feelings. *She told him* the incident of the picture, which

joined to his own impression, amounting almost to conviction, that Edmund was the stranger who was wont to hover round the Palazzo —, furnished what seemed to both their minds irresistible evidence of the fact. To Margaret, this conviction was most acceptable; for although to no human being, and certainly not to Vincent, would she have breathed a word of that part of the affair which weighed most heavily and painfully on her own heart — the interview between Edmund and her sister on the morning of his departure from Grantley — still even that circumstance would assume a different character, if it should turn out to have been the parting of affianced lovers, bound to each other by the most solemn ties, and not the revolting act of a vulgar intrigue, the result of a sudden acquaintance, and a brief flirtation.

To find out the cause and the excuse for such an extraordinary course of deception, and the nature of the obstacles which thwarted such an attachment, if it really did exist, was her most ardent desire; and Vincent, who had heard some vague rumours of the tenor of Mr. Neville's will, which hitherto had been *little spoken* of out of the circle of his family connexions and neighbours, employed himself to the

vestigate the truth of those reports. When he had ascertained that the late Mr. Neville's prejudices had been such as might have deterred his son, even before his death, from avowing such an attachment, and an engagement to a Catholic, much light seemed thrown on the subject, and deep and long were the conferences between Margaret, Vincent, and his sister Lucy, on the probabilities that such invincible difficulties would put an end to an engagement which they concluded must have subsisted, if it did not still subsist; or on the possibility that by an heroic sacrifice Neville would renounce his fortune and claim his bride. To this hope Margaret clung, for she saw, in her sister's declining health, how deeply disappointment and suspense were weighing her down, and she did not sufficiently estimate the difficulties in the way of such a sacrifice, both from the nature of the case and the nature of Edmund's character. The real truth never even glanced across her mind. That any man could have so treated Ginevra, or that Ginevra could have commanded her feelings under such trials, would have seemed to her a gross impossibility. As it was, she would scarcely allow the causes which Vincent urged *in his behalf;* and she looked so very pretty, when

with a heightened colour and a curling lip she expressed her utter contempt for the world, and its riches, and its pomps, which, nevertheless, no one more comfortably indulged in, that Vincent often reverted to the subject only to call forth that indignant expression and eloquent scorn. During all this time it was quite natural that Margaret should have no greater interest than in conversing with Frederic Vincent. A common interest, a subject that we talk of to one or two persons, and never allude to in the presence of others, is one of the strongest possible links between people, and the *regard d'intelligence*, which passes like an electric flash from one to another, opens sometimes a new page in the life of both. But Margaret loved Walter, dearly she loved him, and not a thought that he might not have known passed through her mind the while; when she received his letter, written on the morning of his departure for Paris, she felt only provoked with him for having misunderstood her words, and misinterpreted her conduct, and with herself for having given rise to his suspicions; and when she wrote to him, it was with all the frankness which had ever marked her words and actions: but the truth is, that Walter ought not to have sent that letter.

It certainly opened her eyes to the fact, that, whatever her own might be, Frederic Vincent's feelings towards herself were of a very different nature from those of mere friendship, and it was not in Margaret's disposition to remain perfectly unmoved by such a discovery. She was easily excited by the admiration of others, and could scarcely resist the temptation of ascertaining how far it extended, and of indulging herself in those minor agitations of life which are so agreeable to those whose minds require a stimulus for which they too often draw upon their heart, draining it of its highest emotions to supply the fancy and the waywardness of the passing hour.

She felt bound to take care that Frederic did not fall in love with her. He did not know that she was engaged, and it would be so hard upon him. Perhaps she ought to tell him. How would he feel? How would he look, when informed that she was (she stopped, for she was going to say *in love*) that she was attached to Walter? She met him the next day, and her manner was altered. Vincent remarked it, and he looked so low — so kind, but so low — that she felt quite unhappy. Lucy, too, spoke very pointedly about *her brother;* and Maud shrugged her shoulders, and

talked of caprice. Perhaps Margaret might have written a different letter that day, but the other was gone. Three days later, she had told herself that to be ungracious to Frederic was very unjust, and that nothing would have a greater appearance of coquetry than a change of manner; that the plan was, to be always steadily friendly, and kindly courteous; and therefore, in order not to change, she became very courteous and very friendly again. She bungled sadly, and Frederic began to speak as lovers speak, and she to listen with pleasure, and to wish that he might propose and have done with it, and that she might tell him the truth. That her affections were engaged — was that the *truth?* Conscience whispered, "It *shall* be the truth." Something answered — whether it was conscience answering itself, it would be difficult to say — but certain it is, that during the next few days, conscience asked a great many questions: whether it always got answers, is not so certain. And now Margaret is sitting at the window, and gazing on Hyde Park; but she is thinking of another park, and of the choice which her father has given her. She has just found out that in this autumnal weather the shades of Grantley would be delightful. Her own Arabian pony to

ride, her own sweet flower-garden to tend, her own bright river to gaze upon, and her grandfather and her grandmother to see again, and the parsonage, and Heron Castle — she stopped, another castle is in her mind — Donnington Castle rises to her view too plainly. There is no self-deception possible here. Margaret is herself again.

"Away with these visions!" she exclaims. "Away with these false suggestions! Whatever happens, whatever be the distant duty, there is a clear one now — to leave all other thoughts behind — to go to him, the dearest and the best friend I have — to see him once more, and then away from all this life of excitement — once more by his side, find out if all this has been a feverish dream, or a sad reality."

To this noble resolution was adjoined one of those strange little colloquies with one's self, which are very disturbing when we wish to be heroes (not to our valets or maids, but) to ourselves — "It would be so very ridiculous to have liked three people in one year." And then there was a little, faint, distant, scarcely perceptible whisper, from some corner of the brain, that suggested — "But am I now, or have I ever been,

really in love?" This was so very faint, that perhaps she did not hear it herself.

In a few hours Colonel Leslie, Margaret, and Mrs. Wyndham were on their road to Dover; the first two having previously accompanied Ginevra to the Convent at —, where their parting took place. The two sisters, locked in each other's embrace, seemed hardly able to speak. Their separation was to last but a few weeks, but both felt that those few weeks might prove the most important in their lives; and each was mentally praying for the other as they said farewell. Once more Ginevra threw her arms round Colonel Leslie's neck — once more pressed Margaret to her heart, and then gliding into the chapel, fell on her knees, and remained there for some hours.

When she entered her little room, its simple arrangement, and its various religious ornaments, reminded her of her Italian home; and the sacred Litanies chanted by the nuns — the same which, from her infancy upwards, she had loved to join in, wherever a humble choir of wandering peasants, or of home-bound children, recited them before some wayside image of the Blessed Virgin — carried her back to the days of her childhood, and awoke in her heart a fervent gratitude, that

her faid had made no shipwreck in the midst of the storms which had beset it. Who can describe what the language of the Church is to a Catholic — the type of its universality, the badge of its unity! That voice, reaching unto all lands, and speaking to all hearts! uttering the same well-known accents in the gorgeous temples of the south, and the Gothic shrines of the north, as in the rustic chapel or in the mountain cave, where persecuted worshippers meet in secret. At every altar, in every sanctuary, each sacred rite and solemn hour claim the words of sacred import, which fall on the ear of the stranger and the wanderer, at once as a whisper from his home, and a melody of Heaven.

Ginevra's eyes filled with tears as she joined in the well-known responses, but they were tears that relieved the heart and brain; not like some that she had shed a few days before, when each scalding drop seemed to record the disgrace of one she loved, and whose name she must one day bear in sorrow or in joy, in honour or in shame.

CHAPTER VIII.

After a rapid journey through France and Switzerland, Colonel Leslie, with his sister and Margaret, were drawing near to the small village on the Lake of Lucerne, whence Walter had written the account which had hurried them abroad. Mrs. Wyndham, after wearing herself out with watching and restless talking to her companions, had at last sunk into a state of exhaustion, and, stretched upon the sofa of the cabin, in the small steamer in which they were crossing the lake, remained silently gazing on the coast which they were skirting, and at whose different points they occasionally stopped to take up passengers. Margaret was sitting alone at one end of the deck, with a book in her hand, but with her eyes wandering over the blue waters and the magnificent outline of the snow-crested mountains. She, too, was tired, but more in mind than in body. Not only was she impatient to arrive, on her young cousin's account, but she longed also to clear her own *mind* and heart from the clouds which were obscuring *them. She did* not understand herself, and this torment-

ing sensation made her anxious for some change which would throw a light on her own feelings. She looked back with little pleasure to the last weeks she had spent in London, and would not for worlds have returned to that life of excitement and dissipation; and though she often thought of Frederic Vincent, that thought was connected with something painful which she could hardly explain to herself. Perhaps, during those long hours of meditation which travelling affords, and in which we have such ample time to look back as well as forward, she may have discovered some secret about her own character which had hitherto escaped her. It is not unusual for persons who are conscious of possessing certain good qualities with which certain defects have an apparent inconsistency, to conclude at once that they cannot be liable to the latter, or in any danger of falling into them. Because Margaret was not frivolous in one sense of the word — because her tastes were intellectual, and her character earnest — she had never suspected herself of a tendency to levity, which was, nevertheless, a predominating feature in her mind, though it did not extend to her heart. What excited and interested her at the *moment, whether* subject, pursuit, or person, acquired

an engrossing importance in her estimation, and exercised an almost absolute sway over the deeper feelings and real sympathies of her nature. This sort of disposition, when it is united to great truthfulness of character and honesty of purpose, is often very harassing to its possessors. They learn only by slow degrees to judge their own impressions, to distinguish what is genuine from what is spurious, and from the worthless chaff of emotions hastily called forth and as hastily subsiding, to draw the grain of real value which alone can insure a harvest of happiness. This discriminating power is seldom acquired in early youth, and if the faint dawn of this truth was breaking upon Margaret's mind, while gazing on the blue waters of the Lake of Lucerne, it had scarcely yet assumed a distinct form, even in the secret contemplations of her own mind.

As the steamer approached the small jutting pier of the town of Weggis, Margaret sought eagerly for Walter's figure among the crowd which was awaiting its arrival; and when she saw him leaning against the post to which the rope was fastened, her heart beat quickly as she thought of her poor aunt, and she *looked anxiously* at her father. At last the vessel

touched the shore, and Walter sprang forward. The words "All right" — those very English words — conveyed to them at once all that they longed to hear. They flew from his lips to Margaret's as she rushed into the cabin, and carried the news to the poor mother, who had sat for the last two hours with her head buried in the cushions of her couch, unable to contend with, or to endure, the suspense which a moment of dreadful or delightful certainty was soon to terminate. Young Wyndham was recovering surely, though slowly, and words cannot paint the ecstasies of his mother as she clasped him in her arms, or the transports of gratitude with which she thanked Walter for his care of her child — for the patient kindness with which he had watched over him at the risk of catching, himself, the contagious fever which was endangering his life. Young Wyndham spoke of Walter with tears in his eyes, and Margaret had never felt so fond of her cousin as at that moment. She thought of Walter's goodness — of the love and respect which he inspired to all who approached him; and her ever busy imagination began to conjure up a picture of his happiness, if, confirming by her words the import of her letter, she renewed an *engagement which* she had never really intended to

break off. She could not conceal from herself that she had felt some pleasure in Frederic Vincent's society — that his evident attachment to herself had pleased her fancy, if it had not touched her heart; but at the same time Margaret could not endure not to respect herself, and she was conscious that to prefer Frederic to Walter would be to lower herself in her own eyes; for never had she for an instant doubted the superiority of Sydney's principles, character, and understanding. Vincent was amiable and intelligent, but in the scale of moral excellence, and of intellectual attainments, the distance between them was immense. Margaret was too clever not to see it, too candid not to admit it. Still she was aware that Walter's presence, though it made her happy, did not produce, in her mind, any particular emotion. There was nothing disturbing or exciting in their intercourse, and she doubted whether love was consistent with so calm a state of feeling. 'T is strange how many thoughts can pass through our minds in the course of a few minutes. All these reflections had occurred to Margaret during the short time that she sat by her cousin's couch. When she opened the window of her bed-room, where she had gone to dress *for an early* dinner, it was with intense pleasure that

she gazed on the beautiful landscape before her. The shadows of the mountains were falling on the deep waters of the lake; their snowy crests were bathed in rosy light, while a dark shade rested against their slanting sides. A gentle breeze stirred to and fro the branches of the walnut trees that stood before the rustic inn where they lodged. It swelled the sails of a vessel which was skimming over the smooth surface, like a bird on the wing; for some time it kept near the shore, emerging from darkness into light, according to the height and the breadth of the mountains which it passed; the setting sun was shedding a pathway of light on the liquid expanse, and towards that radiant road the little skiff seemed to advance. Margaret watched its progress with that fanciful interest which we sometimes attach to inanimate objects, connecting their destiny with our own in a kind of half poetical and half superstitious manner. She longed to see it follow the bright track beyond, and trembled lest that glory should die away ere it was reached. She saw the bark enter that path of flashing foam and disappear in the distance as if absorbed in the light that had received it, and Margaret raised her eyes to the serene skies above her head and *rejoiced that in an hour* of excitement she had not acted

on an impulse which her heart would have disowned. She remembered that in proportion as every highest principle and every purest emotion of her mind had free play, her affection for Walter had deepened and increased, and that it had only diminished when vanity and worldliness had thrown a blight on her feelings. Her manner to him when they met again was gentle and affectionate, but there was something in his which checked the levity with which she had been in the habit of addressing him. He treated her with the utmost deference and kindness; but there was an involuntary embarrassment in their intercourse and a restraint in their conversations. She wished to speak to him as in other days with all the frankness which was natural to her; but an invisible barrier seemed to stand between them, and every effort she made to surmount it only convinced her of its existence. His affection was now evinced by a grave, calm interest in her happiness and a marked attention to her wishes, which resembled neither the affectionate familiarity with which he had been wont to address her in the days of happy childhood or thoughtless girlhood, nor the tenderness which had marked his manner during the brief period of their *engagement*. He never made the slightest allusion to

their recent correspondence, or to their future plans, except that he occasionally spoke in a way which indicated how entirely at an end he considered that engagement.

Margaret was deeply vexed at this conduct on his part. It seemed as if her assurances had been disbelieved, and her explanations disregarded. She felt herself not released, but rejected; her annoyance from this impression was increased by the difficulty she felt in doing anything to remove the error which had evidently taken possession of his mind. She could not but remember that it was herself who had originally proposed to marry Walter; a step which nothing could justify but reliance on his boundless affection, and the consciousness that he would never have supposed that she liked him without such encouragement on her part, as, under other circumstances, it would have been unbecoming to offer. He had, doubtless, evinced the utmost joy and gratitude for the precious gift thus bestowed upon him; but, at the same time, he had shown himself keenly alive to the slightest appearance of levity in her conduct. He had accused her, on insufficient and inconclusive grounds, of being attached *to another; he had* given her up without an instant's

hesitation, and after she had denied the charge, and renewed her assurances of attachment to himself, he still persisted in a tacit withdrawal of his claims. She was stung to the quick by this mode of proceeding; her proud and warm temper was thoroughly roused, and her own manner grew every day haughtier and colder. His never altered, and in the midst of her irritation she could not help admiring the perfection of his character. He remarked her uneasiness, but entirely mistaking its cause, his very efforts to remove it only served to increase her wretchedness. He thought that she reproached herself for her fickleness, and he endeavoured to reconcile her with her own conscience, by his cheerful acquiescence in their present position, and expressions of interest in her future happiness with another, which he often pointedly alluded to. That he could do so with a calm voice and serene countenance, exasperated instead of touching her, and her offended pride would not allow her to disclaim the sentiment he ascribed to her.

Owing to the slow recovery of young Wyndham, their stay near the Lake of Lucerne was for some time protracted, and Colonel Leslie, Margaret, and Walter, made several excursions in the neighbourhood. Her

delight in the beauties of nature, and the singular loveliness of the scenery they visited, would have made this a season of great enjoyment, if the moral harmony of her spirits had been in unison with that of the visible world which she so ardently admired; but there were storms in Margaret's breast which rose as suddenly, but did not disperse as quickly, as those that gathered on the Righi, and when she looked at the foaming and capricious torrents discharging their clear, though restless waters into the quiet bosom of the deep lake, she thought that Walter might thus have taken her to his heart, with all her faults and her waywardness, and there given her a refuge from the strife of her own spirit.

One day that she had felt particularly wearied with these struggles with herself, and had been painfully disturbed at hearing Walter project a journey to the Holy Land, which he intended in the course of a few months to undertake, she was mounting her mule at the door of the inn. As he was examining with care the strappings of her saddle, he said in a low voice,

"How often I shall think of these excursions, *Margaret, when I* ride alone through the desert."

She did not answer at first, but after advancing a few steps, she said hastily,

"Your enjoyment will be so perfect, that no recollections will disturb it."

"There are certainly," he replied, "associations connected with the spots I hope to visit, which may well serve to divert the mind from its own sorrows, if, at least —"

"If at least you *had* any sorrows!" Margaret impatiently suggested.

He thought she was annoyed at this hint of a regret on his part, and forced a smile as he replied,

"I see you will not allow me any sorrows, Margaret. Well, I think you are right; with so much to make me happy and grateful, in the lot which is assigned to me, it is wrong to talk in such a strain."

She bit her lip, and they proceeded in silence.

Colonel Leslie asked Walter some question, which drew him to his side, and as they ascended the winding mountain path, they went on conversing together, and she remained alone behind. When the mind is disposed to irritation, it is strange what slight circumstances will produce or keep it up. Margaret felt herself neglected; her thoughts recurred to Frederic

Vincent, and she contrasted his devotion to her with what she termed Walter's indifference. Her eyes filled with tears while she repeated to herself, that after all, she would do well to marry a person of her own age, and one who had not known her too well as a child to care much for her as a woman — that it was better to marry a man who would look up to her, and be influenced by her understanding, than one who would always consider himself so infinitely her superior. "And so he is," Conscience whispered. "No, he is not," Temper answered; "it is neither wise nor good to disbelieve me when I tell him I like him, and to persist in forcing Frederic Vincent upon me, only because I flirted with him for a few days." But Conscience answered again — "When you thought yourself secure of Walter's affection, you trifled with it, and gratified your fancy with another image and another interest." The truth was, that although well acquainted with the admirable qualities of his heart, she had not yet appreciated the full strength of his character, or anticipated with what firmness he would meet a change in their relative positions. It was this discovery, which, while it deepened and exalted her attachment, added to it the poignant regret with which

we look back to a blessing justly forfeited; for she was too sincere not to admit to herself, that although Walter should have answered her letter, even if it had been to question its assertions, she had for one short moment felt the wish to be released from an engagement which stood in the way of the amusement of the hour.

It was this consciousness that deterred her from explaining to him the circumstances which had at first accounted for her intimacy with Vincent. She could not, in the face of Walter's indifference, venture an allusion to the conflicting nature of her own feelings at the period that immediately followed their correspondence, or to the wonder and regret with which she looked back to them now. But it was vain to speculate on what might have been; for whether Walter had at any time loved her more than as a child or a plaything—whether she had ever had a strong hold on his affections—it was evident that he now felt nothing for her, but that affectionate regard which he had shown her from childhood, and would show her as long as they lived. Whatever might be in future her line of conduct with respect to others, she could anticipate *no renewal* on his part of a state of things that had

passed away so completely that it seemed never to have existed Margaret had not calculated on the pain that this would cause her. While secure of Walter's attachment, she might have doubted the strength of her own. She had amused herself with all the little circumstances and alternatives of a flirtation — she would, perhaps, have advanced to the very brink of a marriage with another, and pursued her heedless course with the confidence of a child in leading-strings, as long as in the midst of her own faults and inconsistencies she felt him to be at hand, ready to guard and support her; but when that sense of protection was withdrawn, and she foresaw the moment when he would leave her for years, a vivid perception of the extent of her loss took possession of her mind, and she felt overwhelmed with the prospect of her future loneliness. Several days passed in this way, and Walter, grieved at the paleness of her cheek, and the alternate dejection and irritation of her manner, was led to fear that she had given her heart to Vincent without having received any assurance of a reciprocal attachment. To have seen her happy with another would have been a trial to human nature; but to witness her sufferings *and to feel himself* powerless to console her, was, to

Walter's peculiar character, a harder one still. The kindness and gentleness of his own manner increased every day; but at the same time it marked, in a way that could not be mistaken, how entirely he had ceased looking forward to any ties between them but those of friendship.

One morning that letters were brought to the breakfast-table, he observed Margaret receive one which she hastily put aside, without showing it to her father. As soon as it was possible, she withdrew to her own room, and remained alone during the greatest part of the day. When she appeared at dinner, there were traces of tears in her face, and her countenance was more than usually thoughtful. As Walter passed a table where the letters were habitually laid in readiness for the servant who carried them to the post-office, he saw one in Margaret's handwriting, addressed to Frederic Vincent, and directed to Baden-Baden. He sighed deeply, and did not feel all the satisfaction he would have expected to derive from this proof, that some communication existed between them, and at the impression it conveyed to him, at her inequality of spirits was the result not of harassing uncertainty, but merely of her separation from the object of her

affections. He was grieved that Margaret did not treat him with confidence; but though he would readily have entered on the subject if she had begun it, he did not feel courage to advert to it in the first instance, and thus the estrangement between them deepened every hour. The time arrived at last when young Wyndham was pronounced sufficiently recovered to pursue their journey homeward; and, leaving the neighbourhood of Lucerne, they proceeded towards Germany. At Basle, where they stopped for one night, a packet of letters was lying for them at the inn. One of them was from a cousin of Walter's, who was spending the summer at Baden, and who was anxious to see him on his way through that place. As he was glancing carelessly over the closely-written page, his eye was caught by some words in the cover, which he hastily took up, and where he read the following sentences: — "Mr. Vincent, Lord Donnington's son, has been here; but is just returned to London. He is said to be broken-hearted at having been refused by your travelling companion, the pretty Miss Leslie. Some people say, she behaved ill to him; but I dare say it is not true. People like to make that sort of charge against a girl who has many admirers, and who gives herself the

airs of being fastidious. I wonder, however, that she should have refused Mr. Vincent, for he is good-looking, amiable, and an excellent *parti*. His aunt, Lady Rearsdale, who was with me this morning, says he is perfectly miserable about it."

Walter could scarcely command his agitation as he folded this letter, and looked towards Margaret, who was standing at the window gazing in a listless manner at the Rhine, and at the picturesque old buildings beyond it. He went up to her, and asked her to walk with him. His voice and manner were altogether different from usual, and she looked at him with surprise, though she complied with his request. They went to the old cathedral, and then on to the alley of horse-chestnut trees beyond it, and seated themselves on a low stone wall which overhangs the majestic river. Walter, after a short silence, turned to her abruptly, and said —

"Margaret, will you be very angry with me if I ask you *one* question?"

The expression of his eyes, and the tone of his voice at that instant, were so unlike what they had been for the last few weeks, that a sudden emotion overcame her, but she tried to conceal her agitation by

assuming something of her old manner, and she answered gaily —

"Since when are you so afraid of me, and of my anger, Walter?"

"Margaret," he said in an earnest manner, "Margaret, can it be true that you have refused Frederic Vincent?"

The colour mounted rapidly into her cheeks, and she had a struggle with herself before she made any reply.

"I have been wrong," he hastily exclaimed, as he perceived her uneasiness. "I had no right to inquire. Never mind answering me."

"I *have* refused Frederic Vincent," she said slowly, with her eyes fixed on the ground. His were raised to her face, and there was a vague hope in both their hearts. They looked at each other, but neither of them seemed able to speak. At last, in an almost stern manner, he said —

"Margaret, tell me the truth. Is it possible that you do not care for Vincent?"

Pride and emotion struggled in her heart, and *she rose to go, but* Walter imperiously detained her,

and she exclaimed, at last, in a tone of wounded feeling —

"And is it possible that *you* care to know?"

"Margaret, do not trifle with me now," he returned, with agitation. "There is a limit beyond which self-control cannot extend. I have struggled long, but I cannot restrain myself for ever. If you choose to force from me the avowal that I have suffered more than I had imagined a man could have suffered without betraying it, and, for the sake of your peace of mind, patiently submitted to the pain you have inflicted, hear it now, and in mercy spare the feelings you cannot return. I had hoped, I had resolved, never to speak to you thus; but it may be better for us both that you should know the truth. Forgive me, Margaret, that I could not be silent to the end; forgive me that I could not hear you express such a doubt and answer you calmly. This is the last time I shall ever allude to this subject, or give way to these feelings. Soon I shall leave you."

"Walter!" she exclaimed, while a bright smile flashed through her eyes, lighting up their blue depths, like a ray of sunshine on flowers — "Walter!" she

again repeated, as she turned her face towards him, and half kneeling on the edge of the bench, bent upon him those radiant orbs — "I love you with all my heart; but why did you leave my letter unanswered, and make all this mischief between us?"

"A letter! I never received one from you since I left England; and mine, Margaret! *mine* was a letter that *should* have had an answer!"

"I wrote one, I sent one. I told you to come back. I told you that I loved you, but it was not half so true then as it is now, for it amused me then to be admired by others; I took pleasure in Frederic Vincent's admiration, and almost fancied I liked him. Now look — here is his letter. He speaks of love — I believe he feels it. I care not for it. I would not exchange one word of affection from you, Walter, for all the love, and all the love-letters which the whole world could lay at my feet. There!" — She tore poor Vincent's letter into bits and threw it into the stream — "there, let the Rhine take it and bear it to the ocean; and do you take my vain, light heart into your keeping, and carry it along with you through the river of Life *to the sea of* Eternity! I am yours, Walter —

yours for ever! No more secrets now, Old Walter! No more trials; you must take me, even as I am, for better and for worse; or while we wait till I grow better, I may only grow worse, and yet I shall never release you again. I have been too unhappy; and now, oh, now, I am too happy!"

What Walter felt, what Walter said, cannot well be described; but never in after life will he visit again the horse-chestnut alley near the cathedral of Basle, without an intense emotion, which will be mournful or sweet according as Heaven shall appoint his future lot. The dark cloud which had hung over their prospects passed away in that hour from the hearts of Walter and Margaret; and the joy which filled its place was as pure and as serene as the sky above their heads. Colonel Leslie's concentred but evident delight at the announcement of their engagement, which his daughter insisted upon making to him that very evening, and the glad consent he gave to her marriage, increased their happiness; and it was well for them that they enjoyed a few hours of undisturbed peace — that they had laid up a store of bliss, and tasted its first sweetness ere the morrow came to obscure the brightness, *though not the* blessings, of its eve. Letters reached

lonel Leslie on the following morning, which threw
n, as well as Margaret and Walter, into the greatest
xiety and agitation; but before we reveal their con-
its, we must return to Ginevra, and once more re-
ne the thread of her extraordinary history.

CHAPTER IX.

It was on one of those sultry mornings in the beginning of September, when the air feels sometimes more oppressingly hot than in the dog-days, that Ginevra was standing in the court of a small house in one of the most rural suburbs of London, the residence of the nuns among whom she had for a short time taken up her abode. She was watering a few languid wall-flowers and geraniums on which the soot, which disfigures the neighbourhood of London, as well as London itself, was resting in abundance. It was about a fortnight since she had come to this place, and at first the repose had seemed to do her good; but after the lapse of a few days she became conscious that either she was very ill, or in a strange state of nervous depression; her head at times ached violently, at others, an overpowering drowsiness overcame her; she would fall asleep in the chapel, in the parlour, or in the garden, and waking with crimson cheeks and burning hands, look wildly about her, and start if any one addressed her; in the night she also often woke

suddenly, fancying that some one was standing by her bed-side and calling to her to rise. Ginevra had retired to this convent and secluded herself from all worldly distractions, for the express purpose of reflecting calmly on her position, and at the end of her retreat, if Father Francesco was not by that time arrived in England, to reveal her whole history under the seal of confession to the spiritual director of the convent, an old and experienced priest, with whom she might review the nature and the extent of her duties in the extraordinary position in which she was placed. This was her settled purpose; but she found each day more difficulty in fixing and arranging her thoughts on the subject, or in calling distinctly to mind the chain of incidents which had brought her to this point. A kind of dull apathy seemed to spread over her faculties and her feelings, and if she endeavoured to overcome this unnatural listlessness, the effort was followed by a sharp pain that darted like fire through her brain. The intense and unseasonable heat of the weather, added perhaps to this sensation; some of the nuns remarked that there was something strange in the expression of her eyes. They were at *all times very* peculiar, but now the brilliancy of those

light blue orbs was in singular contrast with the general languor of her appearance. Time seemed to pass by her unperceived; she would sometimes remain for hours together, seated on a bench in the garden, gazing on the ring which was usually concealed in her bosom, but which she now occasionally drew out. If any one, however, approached her, or fixed their eyes upon it, she started with a frightened and bewildered look, and hid it again with precipitation. There was a poor family in the neighbourhood of the convent, which Ginevra had been in the habit of visiting since she had been in London. The father was an Italian courier who had travelled from Genoa to England with the Warrens and herself, and had remained a few days at Grantley Manor after their return. He had been for many years married to an Englishwoman, and had lately found some difficulty in supporting her and a large number of children. Having failed to get a place during the London season, he had applied to Ginevra in his distress, and had interested her in behalf of his family. She exerted herself earnestly for their relief, and was of great use to one of his daughters who had met with an accident, and been confined to her bed for several weeks. In the close little room,

where the invalid lay surrounded with squalling children and with the wet clothes, which the poor washerwoman had no other way of drying, hung up over her very bed, the presence of Ginevra was hailed with that smile of heartfelt satisfaction which is never elicited merely by the hope of pecuniary assistance.

The idea had never even occurred to her, that it was possible to *visit the poor* in the spirit of harsh dictation and arrogant superiority, which at one time seemed prevalent among us, as if their poverty gave us, in itself, a right to invade their houses, to examine into their concerns, and to comment and animadvert on their conduct in a manner which we would not ourselves endure from our best friends. It is long before we practically learn, though many among us are learning it by slow degrees, that we should respect the poor, and count it an honour and a blessing to have them "always with us," as our Lord told us we should — to cast aside our refinement, our sensitiveness, our delicacy, and our false shame, and perform real offices of love to the poor, not as a matter of display or effort (though there may, and must be, some effort in it at first), but as the natural result of our belief in Christ's words, and our trust in his promises.

This was the spirit that made Ginevra's charity so particularly acceptable to the poor and suffering; it was tender and affectionate, and it was so without constraint. It was as natural to her to take on her knees one of the washerwoman's ragged children, or to kiss the pale forehead of her sick daughter, as it would have been to caress one of Lady Donnington's little boys, or to embrace Mrs. Warren after an absence of some weeks; and who can measure the amount of sympathy, and of consolation, comprised in those small details, which insensibly tell on the spirits of the sad and the suffering. The advance of civilization, the progress of worldly affairs, are gradually tending to a greater assimilation between the different classes of society; but the political barriers may vanish, and the social ones may remain in full force, and even with far more offensive stringency than ever, if the reserve (it cannot, in all cases, be called the pride) of wealth is suffered to remain in unabated vigour. The real source of influence is sympathy; the only means of exercising it is through sympathy; and we may bestow alms without end, and have societies without number, and see no results from our gifts and our labours, till we reach the hearts of the poor — and strange hearts

they would be, if the distant nod, and the formal investigations, and the measured terms in which we are wont to address them, were to win them to us and to our objects! "Man does not live by bread alone" is a sentence which has a meaning even short of its highest spiritual sense; there is a germ of feeling in the human breast which springs into existence in the sunshine of another's sympathy, though for years, perhaps, it may have lain cold, and apparently dead, till some have even doubted its existence. But it is worth seeking for in the most unpromising soils; it is a flower which God has planted, and we may find it blossoming in the midst of apparent barrenness, like the Alpine rose in the depths of the glaciers.

While Ginevra was watering her flowers, the door of the court opened, and Giovanni's wife made her appearance, with her youngest baby in her arms. The child screamed for joy at seeing her, and soon the mother was relieved of her burthen and seated on the bench in the centre of the flower-garden. She began relating various particulars regarding her difficulties, while the baby, who had seized hold of the cross which Ginevra wore, was playing with it, and holding it up alternately to her and to his mother. Both their

care-worn faces, stamped with the impression of protracted anxiety, different in its nature but similar in its effects, contrasted with the joyousness of the infant, who seemed as if he was offering to them both, in his unconscious glee, the symbol of suffering and the standard of hope. A fresh subject of sorrow was oppressing the heart of the poor mother, and she imparted it with tears to Ginevra's sympathising ears. Her husband had accepted a place which would take him abroad for a greater length of time than usual, and she would be left to struggle alone with her difficulties. He did say, indeed, that he would send her money out of his wages; but she knew, from past experience, that this was an uncertain prospect, and she feared, that once *abroad* — that vast, comprehensive, mysterious word, which causes so many hearts to sink within them with a nameless dread—he would not be always able, or always willing, to transmit to her those promised remittances, and the workhouse, that other word of fear, was haunting her imagination.

"The worst of it is, Miss Leslie," she went on, after wiping the corners of her eyes with her apron, "the worst of it is, that it 's so sudden like. I don't know but he 'll be off to-morrow, as the gentleman

his new master is going to be married, and to go from the church door to the sea side, and abroad in a few days. Not a minute will he have to come and say a word of comfort to one, or to settle one's mind any ways. Them that goes abroad thinks but little of it to be sure, but it seems hard enough to them that stays behind. It was all a-settled last night, he says, and how it 's such a good place, and I know it is, but for to go and leave us so suddenly, is not what he ever did before, and just now, when everything is so dear —"

"But Giovanni is a good man," interrupted Ginevra, in a soothing manner, "and he will not forget you and his poor children, and as his place is a good one, you will receive more assistance from him now, than when he was only engaged by the week. What is his master's name?"

"It 's here in the letter, Miss. May be you would like to see it?" and Bessy held out to Ginevra the crumpled scrawl which she had drawn out of her pocket. After glancing over the first page, which comprised nothing but oddly worded regrets at leaving England, and excuses for the sudden nature of the arrangement, her eyes fell on the following words: —

"My new master is Mr. Neville. I saw him and settled with him last night at Mivart's Hotel; you know *that* Mr. Neville, who was staying at Grantley Manor when I went there with Mr. Warren; it was all along of him that I got the place. He is going to be married to-morrow at St. George's, Hanover Square, and I am to be there at half-past eleven, with the carriage that is to take him and his wife to Hastings —"

At that moment, the clock was striking ten at the neighbouring parish church.

"Mivart's Hotel! — Mr. Neville — Grantley Manor — marriage — St. George's — that very day — that hour — the date — yesterday — going abroad!"

Oh, there is strength in the human frame when terror awakens it. There is a might in the feeble limbs when despair lends them speed. Weights have been lifted — walls have been scaled — bolts have been wrenched by the weak hands of women, when love and fear have made them strong; and she too can struggle, she too can fly, she too can reach that spot, lift up her voice at that altar, or die at its foot! She did not faint, she did not tremble now, she did not even turn pale. She gave the child to its mother, and drew her shawl over her breast, as if she had been

cold. The thermometer was at eighty, and the sun shining on her at the time. She stared at Giovanni's wife for a second as if about to speak, and then darted out of the door, and into the lane that led to the London Road. She walked — she ran — she flew along the dusty foot-path. She was cold and shivered but her head was burning. An omnibus passed, in a minute she was inside. Then the intensity of suffering began. While she walked it had not been so acute; now the horses crawled along, while the fever raged in her veins. The coachman stopped for another passenger. She went almost mad. Each impediment, each delay, sent the blood to her head with violence, and then with a sickening revulsion back again to her heart. The crimson spot on her cheek grew deeper and deeper; the brilliancy of her eyes vanished, a dull film spread over them. She knew, or felt, or saw nothing, but that a crime was about to be committed, that she was dying, and that the road was lengthening before her. The fixity of her purpose guiding her, the intensity of fear paralysing her, the dreadful strength of agony supporting her, she went on, each second a minute, each minute an hour, that hour an eternity of suffering. The driver stopped again; she clenched her

hands together and wrung them. "Are you wanting to get on? What's the matter wi' you?" said a rough man by her side. She did not answer, but he looked into her face and saw that the delay was killing her. "Have you money to pay for a cab? It would take you faster?" They were just passing a stand. She rushed out, was asked for the fare, and put her purse into the driver's hand. He took out a shilling, and gave it back to her, but shook his head, and touched his forehead with a significant gesture as she passed him. She sprung into a cab, gave the coachman a sovereign, and said, in a scarcely audible tone, and then, when not understood, in a loud startling manner — "To St. George's, Hanover Square!" and, crouching at the bottom of the carriage with her head against the front seat, she prayed not to be too late — that prayer which has no form, no words, no cry, nothing but a silent wrestling for mercy — the struggle of a great agony which God sees and hears. Her sufferings drew to a close. Flashes of light seemed to pass before her eyes. Strange sounds mingled in her ears with the distant growling of the thunder. An unnatural strength seemed to animate her. She began to speak in a loud voice, and was conscious that she did

so, and yet could not stop. She knew not where she was. Earth seemed passed away, Time to be no more. The carriage stopt — she sprung out — passed through the portal into the church — gazed wildly down the nave — tried to speak, to move, to scream, for he stood at the altar; she could not — she gasped — she stretched out her arms. He turned — he saw her — he knew her — he was with her — her arm was drawn in his — and through the crowd they darted away across the square towards Oxford-street, unconscious where they were, unconscious of what they were doing. He pressed her arm to his heart, but the mute caress was not returned; he spoke to her in short broken sentences, and no answer passed her lips; still she kept up with him, and walked on with her eyes bent on the ground. He asked, at last, in dreadful agitation, "Ginevra! do you hear me?" She stared at him and said "Yes." "Where have you been? — where do you come from? — will you not answer me, Ginevra?" Still she said "Yes," in that same strange voice, and gazed on him with the same fixed dull look as before. He turned very pale. A horrible thought occurred to him; one of those thoughts which freeze a man's blood in his veins and make a cold sweat start

on his brow; and the while, they stood in one of those crowded London thoroughfares, jostled by hundreds of busy hurrying passers-by — brought together he knew not how — an unnatural silence between them — his mind unable to contemplate the next step to be taken — and still they walked on, and still she spoke not. It was as if her spectre was accompanying him. He addressed her again in words of supplication, and still she answered "Yes," in that deep unnatural tone. He grew almost frantic. "She is mad — she is mad" he said to himself. He felt it; he knew it; *he* had driven her mad! Concentred in that instant was all the suffering which remorse and despair can inflict on a human soul. If she had not been there he might have destroyed himself, but she was at his side, and he must carry her to some spot where they might spend together what remained of life and reason, or, bereft of both, share a common cell or a common grave. To part with her while a ray of hope remained, to survive her if hope was at an end, seemed impossible. "Will you come with me, my Ginevra?" he gently said, and made a sign to a coachman to draw near. She did not answer, but sprung into the cab as if by a kind *of instinct.* He directed the man to drive to a house

on the outskirts of London, where a woman who had been for many years housekeeper in his family kept lodgings, and then drawing down the blinds of the carriage, he took his wife in his arms and pressed her to his heart. She struggled to release herself, and knelt again, as she had done before, with her head on her hands, giving no sign of consciousness but a faint moaning which revealed an intensity of suffering which words cannot describe. As they passed a church, the clock struck twelve. At the first stroke she raised her head, and cried; "Too late! Too late!" and grasped convulsively a paper which was rolled up in her hand. Edmund drew it from her; it was Giovanni's letter, and part of the mystery was solved. At the first glance he perceived the confusion between his cousin's name and his own, and the allusion to his sister's marriage, which had caused the fatal mistake. How Ginevra came to be in England he knew not; how or when she had returned to it, he guessed not — had she gone out of her mind before the departure of her family, and escaped from the hands of others? His heart sickened at the thought, but the letter forbade that supposition. It was a horrible torture that Edmund Neville was going through. He had married a

woman he adored, he adored her still, and he had driven her *mad* — to have killed her would have been less dreadful. Once she had said to him, "How will you answer at the day of judgment, for torturing a human soul into destruction?" Her soul, blessed be the God whom she served, had not been lost in the fierce conflict; but even this he knew not. Where she had been, what she had done, whither she was going, what design or what chance had brought her into his presence in that hour of retribution, he knew not; nothing but that she was there by his side, and that life was ebbing and reason failing. When the cab stopped before Mrs. Atkinson's house, and the step was let down, he took Ginevra in his arms, and carried her upstairs, while the old housekeeper gazed on him in silent amazement.

"Open that door!" he said, imperiously, as they reached the landing-place; and when his command was obeyed, he laid her on the bed and stood by her side. For a moment she remained perfectly still in the position in which he had placed her. He removed her bonnet, and one of her locks got entangled in the velvet ribbon round her neck, and accidentally drew it *from her bosom*. She started, seized her wedding ring,

and mechanically sought to hide it. He saw this; Heaven knows what he felt; he took it from the ribbon, put it on her finger, and pressed his burning lips to the passive hand which was yielded to his grasp. Then he went to dispatch two messengers, one for a doctor and his own servant, and the other to tell his sister that an unexpected occurrence had summoned him away, and would detain him in London; but that he would write to her at Hastings.

As he was returning to the room where Ginevra was, Mrs. Atkinson stopped him, and said, in a trembling voice —

"Mr. Edmund, I owe everything I possess in the world to your family. This house is your's more than mine — still, Mr. Edmund, I must say —"

"She is dying, Atkinson — she is dying; and if she dies, I am a wretch for whom life will be a curse. Help me to save her if you would save me from hell."

Frightened and agitated, the old woman followed him into the room, and stood at the foot of the bed, and after remaining there a moment, turned away in tears. The youthful features — the fragile form — the long dark eyelashes resting on the sunken cheek — the *traces of past suffering* stamped on the present insensi-

bility of the care-worn face, over which a dark dull heaviness was gathering — it was a sight of more than common sorrow! Edmund drew her arms round his neck, and pressed her to his breast.

"Ginevra! Ginevra!" he repeated twice, with heart-rending despair. She seemed to hear him, for she shuddered, and drew him closer to herself. "Ginevra — my own Ginevra — speak to me;" he murmured in her ear. She started, grasped his hands, looked at him, and then gave a piercing cry, which was succeeded by a laugh — one of those fearful laughs that make the blood run cold, and the hair stand on end. A brain-fever had begun, — a continued delirium ensued — and then was poured forth the anguish which that slight frame and that strong spirit had so long contended against. It was a dreadful retribution for Edmund Neville to stand by that bed and listen to those ravings, — to drink that cup of misery to the dregs, and to feel that it was not man's hand that was forcing it to his lips — that it was not a judgment of man's designing which had overtaken him in that hour of vengeance — that One mightier than himself had smitten him with his own weapons, and condemned him out of his own mouth. Then he, for the first time, felt whom he had

striven against, when he had put his own human will in opposition to the conscience of a fellow-creature, and the nature of the warfare he had waged against the faith of that young heart, which had not yielded in weakness but broken in agony. He felt it, and he prayed — he knelt by that bed, and prayed as men pray when death is at hand and no help near — as they pray, when earth gives way beneath their feet, and eternity opens before them. Sometimes, in the midst of her delirium, she would raise her eyes to his, or hide her face in his breast as if to find there a shelter, and then start back in wild affright, and cover her face with her burning hands, as if some vision had scared her. The terror which his presence, which his whispered words of love seemed to cause her, increased every hour; and when the doctors came at last, they forced him from her side, and forbade him to stand in her sight, or to speak within her hearing. Then his sufferings deepened as he sat alone in the front room of that dark house. If pangs inflicted upon others can be expiated by those endured by ourselves, Edmund Neville atoned during that night for those he had caused to his wife. To know that, if he lost her (and in the words and the faces of all who approached him, he

vainly sought for a gleam of hope that he would *not* lose her) he should be the veriest wretch that ever trod the earth, — bereft of the one only being he really loved — desolate, lonely, with faith enough in the reality of what she had lived and died for, to be goaded with a perpetual remorse, and not enough to be raised from the abyss of despair — these were the forebodings and visions of that long night, broken by nothing but the sound of her voice calling upon him, even in the midst of the ravings of delirium, and adjuring him not to forsake her.

After two days and nights of such misery as many have, in some measure, experienced — as *all*, perhaps, have, in some degree, been acquainted with; but which, thank Heaven, is seldom barbed with the stings of insupportable remorse — he heard that the violence of the fever had abated, and that a gleam of consciousness had returned; but other symptoms had shown themselves which excited much uneasiness in the minds of the medical men, and they reiterated their injunctions that he should, on no account, present himself before her eyes. At the same time they assured him that no immediate fatal termination to her illness was to be *apprehended*, though the eventual result, both as re-

garded life and reason, was, to the last degree, precarious. When two of the physicians, who had been in constant attendance upon Ginevra, had withdrawn, Dr. Drury, who had long been acquainted with Edmund and his family, remained behind, and ventured an inquiry as to the name and social position of the young person in question, and suggested that if she had any friends who would be willing to see her, it might be as well to consult with them, especially in the event of her mind being impaired by the violence of the brain-fever. He fixed his eye on Edmund as he pronounced that sentence, and was shocked at the sight of the suffering he had inflicted; he felt embarrassed in the presence of feelings whose extent or depth he had not measured. The compassionate familiarity with which he had spoken of Ginevra had brought before Edmund, with a painful clearness, the nature of her position in the eyes of others; but, as a breath of air over a scorching desert, there passed, almost at the same moment, through his mind, a thought which gave momentary relief to his sufferings. He would proclaim her his wife on her death-bed, and sacrifice on her grave every worldly hope — every earthly prospect. *He would fetch his* sister to her side, and with his

dying treasure in his arms, bid an eternal farewell to all he had ever valued, and which he now loathed as the price for which he had bartered Ginevra's life. "Save her," he said, and convulsively grasped the doctor's hand; "save her, and me — if you can." He could not proceed — a strong emotion overcame him, and for the first time he gave way to a burst of grief which found vent in tears. That dreadful trial had done its work, the pride, which had been almost as strong as death, but not so strong as remorse in the presence of death, was bowed down to the dust; the indomitable spirit had yielded in the unequal strife, and the iron will melted in the furnace of affliction. In broken accents he committed Ginevra to the care of Dr. Drury and Mrs. Atkinson, and prepared to leave that house for the first time, since he had entered it with his wife in his arms; but first he approached the door of her room, and kneeling on the threshold, covered his face with his hands, and then stretched them towards the bed where she lay, keeping down the while, with a violent effort, the convulsive sobs that were heaving his chest. He heard her murmur his name *in her* uneasy sleep, and then a shudder ran through *her frame*, and she seemed to struggle with some

imaginary danger, Her arms were thrown round the bed-post, and she clasped it so firmly that the nurse could not draw her from it, till, bruised and exhausted, she fell back and remained pale and motionless as a marble image of death. As Edmund left that room he turned to the doctor, who had led him hastily away, and said in a low voice,

"In a few hours I shall be here again — to see her — die, perhaps —" he added, with a burst of uncontrollable emotion, which he surmounted and continued, "You tell me I shall see her again. I know you would not willingly deceive me; but, if you should be yourself deceived — if she should wake — and be conscious — and be — dying — and I not here — say this to her — say that I told you she was my wife — that I loved her — that I will be faithful to her till I die. That — if the blessing which in my madness I forfeited, is taken from me — that my life shall be a long or a short expiation, as the justice, or the mercy of Heaven shall appoint. Tell her that her family and mine, and the whole world, shall know that I loved, married, idolised her — but broke her heart, and lost her — that she was an angel, and I — her *husband* — *do not* tell her what I am; she knows it.

but say, that I, too, know it now — that I hate myself. Of *her* I cannot speak — *she* will not hate me — watch her, save her if you can. O my God! what is to become of me, if I lose her? — the curse of Cain! and *he* did not love his brother. Doctor, did you ever know a man who adored a woman, and killed her?"

The person he was addressing looked at him with astonishment, hardly comprehending the meaning of these incoherent sentences; but anxious that a calmer attendant on Ginevra's sick-bed should be speedily summoned, he urged Edmund's departure, and exhorted him to assemble, without delay, those persons who had an interest in her. Much of what he had said he considered as the ravings of a grief heightened to distraction by self-reproach, and shaking him kindly by the hand, he left him, without making any further inquiries regarding the extraordinary communication he had made to him.

When Edmund found himself in a post-chaise-and-four on his road to Hastings, where his sister, Mrs. Charles Neville, had removed, he felt bewildered with *the strangeness* of his situation, and unable to fix his *thoughts on* anything, but the scene he had just left,

and to which he pined to return. Such a revolution had taken place in his feelings, that he scarcely knew himself again; his fears, his hopes, his sufferings, were all of a different nature from any he had yet experienced. Pride and shame scarcely touched him; they were absorbed in deeper emotions. He could scarcely look backward or forward; he felt like a man who, wrecked on a stormy sea, has yielded up, after a long struggle, the spar which he had clung to with desperate tenacity; a fearful future is before him, but one kind of suffering is at an end. He is adrift on the ocean, but the dreadful contest is over, he has ceased to battle with the waves; his vain efforts cannot save him; the abyss is beneath him, and Heaven above him, clouded, dark, black with storms, but not wholly shut out from his expiring glance.

It was on an autumn day of sunny radiance and gorgeous gladness, that Edmund Neville took this journey. It was the time of the hop-gathering — the people were at work in crowds, and the land seemed to smile in its rich abundance. When some of the busy labourers, or of the merry idlers that gazed for an instant on the travelling carriage that passed rapidly *through those fair* scenes and lovely villages, caught

sight of the stranger's face, an involuntary sigh escaped them, for it was no ordinary countenance that met their eyes, and the stamp of no ordinary suffering that marked it. As the lengthening shadows indicated the approach of evening, he came in sight of Hastings, and soon drove up to the door of his sister's house.

Mrs. Neville was alone, and started when the servant announced her brother; but she came to meet him, and held out her hand kindly, but coldly. He was looking so dreadfully ill, however, that she felt shocked and anxious; but unaccustomed to give vent to her feelings, she sat down again, and began to speak of indifferent things. He did not answer a word, but remained standing by the chimney, with his eyes fixed on the clock, and apparently unconscious of her presence.

She said at last, "I will send word to Charles that you are here;" and she got up to ring the bell. He stopped her hand, and said abruptly —

"Bear with me for an instant, I have but this moment to be with you — my wife is dying."

Mrs. Neville did not say a word, but drew a deep breath, and clasped her hands together. He went on in a hurried manner —

"You may suppose *why* I am here. I ought to ask your forgiveness, for I have deceived and defrauded you —" she made an impatient gesture, and he went on — "I have been married for more than a year to Colonel Leslie's daughter. She is a Catholic. You know the rest. You cannot hate and despise me half so much as I hate and despise myself."

He shaded his face with his hand, and leant against the chimney. She looked at him earnestly for a moment, and then went up to him, put her hand on his shoulder, and said —

"Brother!"

He flung himself into her arms, and both cried bitterly.

"Do you forgive me, Anne?" he murmured.

She laid her forehead on his shoulder, and again burst into tears.

"You would forgive me if you knew how wretched I am — she is so ill."

"Where is she, Edmund?"

"At Mrs. Atkinson's house. I took her there on the day of your marriage; at the moment when I suddenly left your side, she had appeared to me as a vision; at the church door I had seen her, and when I

reached her she could not speak, she could n
complain — her mind was affected. I suffered -
God only knows what I have suffered. Anne, y
never, never can understand the misery I ha
endured."

She passed her hand over his brow, and her te
almost blinded her, for many were the grey hairs amo
those locks which, three days ago, were as black
the raven's wing.

"I care not what becomes of me," he resumed;
is not poverty, or truth, or repentance, that has brou
me here; but only misery — misery so deep, so v
so boundless, that it has made all earthly possessi
valueless. But I know you forgive me," he contin
raising her hand to his lips — "I know you feel
me, though I am an impostor."

"O, brother, brother!" she cried, and hid her
in his breast, then raising her head, she said earnes
"you have spoken now, when you might have remai
for ever silent."

"Silent *now?* — O, Anne, you do not know w
she is — you do not know what I have done.
lose her! — it would be more than I can bear, and
I see it coming."

He shuddered, and fell into a chair, his face covered with his hands. Anne knelt by his side, and in a moment asked, in a subdued voice —

"How came she to be in England? — her father and sister are gone abroad."

"I do not know, Anne — I cannot tell. I received her in my arms even as a brain-fever was raging in her frame. In mercy or in wrath she was sent to me to die in my sight. I know nothing more, but that she *is* dying, and that my own brain is maddening, and my heart breaking."

Anne sighed deeply. Strange thoughts were passing through her mind of the ways of God not being as man's ways, of men marring by their evil deeds what Heaven had ordained for them; of a mysterious Providence over-ruling, for vengeance or for mercy, the passions of men's hearts — of plain paths made crooked through their iniquities — of gracious purposes forfeited by a blinded self-will — but she only said, "Mercy will be shown to you, brother, for your sufferings are great."

At that moment her husband entered the room. A *burning flush* passed over Edmund's brow, a convulsive

emotion on his face; but he went up to his cousin and shook hands with him; then turning to his sister, he said, in a firm voice —

"Heaven bless you, Anne, for the mercy you have shown me. Tell *him* what a guilty wretch I have been, what a miserable wretch I am now, and both pray for me — that Ginevra —"

He could say no more; and moved towards the door. Anne whispered a few words to her husband, and then, touching her brother's arm, she said, gently —

"I am going with you, Edmund. Wait a moment, while I get ready. Charles will follow us in a few hours."

Edmund folded her in his arms, and hope revived in his heart. When she put her arm within his, he felt as if Heaven was having mercy on him. She withdrew an instant with her husband, and said to him, in a low voice —

"Must I tell him now?"

"You must judge of that yourself," he replied, and in a moment she was in her brother's carriage, and *they were* rapidly proceeding towards London.

To Anne and to her husband the discovery of that day had been more agitating than surprising, for both had long suspected the truth which had thus been disclosed to them.

CHAPTER X.

For several hours Ginevra had been asleep, and it was not till about an hour after Edmund's departure for Hastings that she opened her eyes; they wandered in silent astonishment round the room where she was lying — they rested at last on the face of the old woman who had been watching all night by her side and whose features were strange to her. Too weak to speak or almost to think, she closed them again and sighed deeply. Mrs. Atkinson, whose heart had, in spite of herself, been gradually warming towards her charge, bent over her and said in a soothing manner —

"Are you better, my dear?"

Ginevra looked up into her face with a bewildered but conscious expression, and then raising with difficulty her thin hands to her head, she pressed them to her temples, and finding her hair was gone, she began to tremble.

"Have I been mad?" she whispered.

"No, no, my dear, it was only a fever; it is over now, and —"

"Is it over?" she said, in a louder tone, and glancing with a frightened look at all the objects round her. "It is *not* over, all is strange here. Where am I? — in another world? — or am I mad? — speak. Oh, how my head aches! Who brought me here?"

"Now, be quiet, do — there's a dear, and try to go to sleep again. The doctors said you were not to talk and excite yourself," said Mrs. Atkinson, who justly feared to mention Edmund's name.

"Who brought me here?" repeated Ginevra, trying to raise her weak head from the pillow.

"Your friends, my dear. Now do be quiet and go to sleep."

She might as well have bidden the waves be still or the wind be silent.

"Who brought me here? Who stood one night at the foot of that bed? Who was weeping in that next room all last night? I heard him. Who knelt at that door and beckoned to me to come just now. I *could not* — I *could not* —"

"Hush, my dear. It was only Mr. Neville come to see how you did."

"Come to see how I did! What does it all mean? Where am I? Who am I? What am I? What has

he done with me? Where are my father and my sister? I am horribly afraid. What is this house? Whose is this house? Who are you?"

"Mrs. Atkinson, your nurse, my dear. This is my house. How you tremble; don't be frightened, my dear. How scared you look. Shall I say a prayer for you?"

Ginevra held out her hand and feebly pressed the old woman's while she murmured, —

"Thank God for those words. I can trust you now. But I think I am dying. My brain is so confused; send for a priest — a —"

She could not finish the sentence, but showed the nurse a little crucifix in her hand and then fell back exhausted. Mrs. Atkinson rang the bell in a hurry, and in the first instance sent for the doctor, and then proceeded to consider how she could best comply with Ginevra's request. The crucifix and the rosary which she wore about her sufficiently indicated that she was a Catholic, and the only question was to find out the name and the residence of a priest of that religion. Her next door neighbour had a Catholic maid-of-all-work who attended the Chapel in — street, and she *learnt from this* girl that one of the priests there was

a foreigner, which immediately decided her to dispatch a messenger in that direction; for Ginevra's name, and the foreign language in which she had been constantly raving in her delirium, had made her aware that she was not a native of England. Mrs. Jones' maid volunteered to go in search of the Abbé Rossi. Ginevra's strange arrival at Mrs. Atkinson's had been for the last three days a subject of universal discussion in the neighbourhood, and all sorts of stories had been circulated about the beautiful young foreigner who had been brought by Mr. Neville to No. 5, Melville Terrace, and had gone mad, and was dying in the retired housekeeper's house. Some asserted that he had poisoned her, and that it was a crying shame that he had not been arrested. Others declared that an inquest would be held on the body as soon as she was dead, and that strange doings would then come to light. Some reported that Mr. Neville had fled from the house that morning in a chaise-and-four, and looking as pale as if he felt the police at his heels. The comments on his conduct and on Mrs. Atkinson's were endless; much wonder was expressed that she had not turned such a creature from her doors; and it was predicted that no *respectable person* would ever enter her house again.

It was answered that no doubt Mr. Neville had made it worth her while to receive her; and it was even darkly hinted that may be he had made it still more worth her while to put the poor young creature altogether out of the way. Some shook their heads and prophesied that she would not pass that threshold alive; and others confidently asserted that she had escaped from Bedlam, where her friends had put her out of harm's way. With her head full of these various stories, and withal an honest and pious anxiety to procure the poor object of these reports the spiritual consolations which she needed, Martha Blunt hastened along the streets in the direction of — Chapel. When she reached it, and knocked at the door of the small adjoining house, it was opened by a maid, who informed her that the Abbé Rossi was absent for some days; and that Mr. Connor, the English priest, was out, and not expected at home for several hours. Martha made an exclamation of disappointment, and asked the girl if she could direct her to any other priest, as the case was urgent, and admitted of no delay.

"And sure is the poor thing dying, and she a sinner!" cried the warm-hearted Irish girl in a tone *of real distress*, and she began rehearsing with volu-

bility all the reasons that made it impossible to pursue Mr. Connor through his various visits, and her fears that it might be full seven o'clock before he returned to his hurried dinner. At last an idea struck her, which she immediately imparted to Martha. Two days ago, she said, an Italian priest had come on a visit to the Abbé Rossi, and she had heard him mention that very morning that he had received faculties from the Catholic bishop of London to hear confessions in his diocese, with the view of assisting, for a while, the priests of — Chapel in their overwhelming labours. "And sure," added Kate Bryan, "he is at this blessed moment saying mass at the side altar; and if you will wait here, or which will be more for your soul's good, say a prayer in the chapel for that poor young dying creature, sure it's me that shall speak to him as he comes out, and it's you that will show him the way to her, for sorrow can he make it out for himself in this same blessed London, which was never intended for strangers to walk in, except just to lose their way and learn the language by asking it."

When the priest came into the vestry, he found the two girls waiting for him, and Kate made him aware of the object of Martha's visit. He understood English

quite well, and spoke it a little. On hearing the circumstances of the case, which were related to him with several additions from the comments of the neighbours, he immediately prepared to follow Martha. It was with a sigh that he glanced over a letter which had reached him that morning: it spoke of difficulties and troubles besetting one he loved, and whom he had been that day about to seek, and the delay which this new call of duty imposed upon him was one of those countless sacrifices of which the life of a priest is composed. It would have been difficult for any one to look upon this old man without a feeling of reverence; his brow was thoughtful, and his countenance had that mild and grave serenity which is sometimes the visible sign of a life throughout which every selfish object has been renounced, every passion subdued, and every virtue practised. His head resembled some of those pictures which are met with of aged saints, whose wrinkled brows and withered features bear the stamp of an unearthly beauty. In broken English he asked his guide some questions about the person he was about to see; but could learn nothing more than that a rich gentleman of the name of Neville had brought *her to Mrs.* Atkinson's, had remained himself in the

house till that morning, had sent for three doctors to attend her, and paid the builders next door to suspend their work since her arrival. She added that Mrs. Atkinson's maid, who had been sometimes in the sick room, supposed that she must have done something very dreadful, poor thing, for that, in her delirium, she was always bidding them not tell, and asking if any one knew who she was; and then she would be searching for something, and feeling her neck, and crying out all of a sudden, "He has taken it away; give it me back — give it me back."

"Is the gentleman a Catholic?" the priest inquired.

Martha thought not; but could not tell for sure.

"Did he know that she had sent for a priest?" he asked again.

He had gone away some hours before, and was not expected back till the evening, she replied, and then pointed to the house, which they had nearly reached. Mrs. Atkinson was standing at the door, and when the priest went up to her, she received him civilly, and said, as she showed him into the parlour, that the *young person* who had sent for him had fallen asleep.

and that the doctor had desired her not to be disturbed, but that if his reverence would wait in the front room, she would be at hand to let him know as soon as she awoke. He was accordingly shown up stairs, and Mrs. Atkinson gliding into the next room, which was nearly dark, he remained alone. Seating himself in a chair by the chimney, he took out his breviary and began to read it in silence, the ticking of the old clock on the mantel-piece, and the occasional rustling of the housekeeper's silk gown, being the only sounds that were audible in the profound stillness of that apartment. After a while he closed his book and listened, for the sufferer had become restless and was talking in her sleep. A strange expression passed over the old man's face. Some Italian words had reached his ears. He rose and walked softly up and down the room. As he passed by a writing-table near the window, his eyes fell on an object which arrested his attention; it was a rosary which had once been his own, he could not be mistaken; and as he grasped it with one hand, and pressed the other to his temples as if to collect his senses, he asked himself if it was possible that she to whom he had given these beads *could have* parted with them. He struggled with a

thought that was forcing its way into his mind; he prayed against it; but neither efforts nor prayers availed. It took a form, it grew, it advanced upon him, it mastered him. The housekeeper came in at that moment, and said, "She is awake now, and seems calm, though very weak. Will you go to her?"

The old man rose and advanced towards the door. A single ray made its way through the half opened shutter of the sick room, and cast a faint light on the carpet. There was a chair placed by the side of the bed; he approached it, and stood in that dark room, with his eyes clouded, and his heart beating. The dying woman murmured, "Father, give me your blessing," in so faint a tone, that it conveyed nothing to him, but the intimation that his sacred ministry was called for. She had hid her face in her hands, and he solemnly pronounced the answering benediction. She heard it — she trembled — she gasped for breath, stretched out her arms, cried "Father!" and then fainted away. When she revived, Mrs. Atkinson was standing near her, and bathing her temples. Her eyes sought Father Francesco, and met his calm, mournful *gaze. A ray of light* had fallen on that bed of sor-

row, and, as he feared, of shame, and he had s
there the only being he loved on earth. Now, ind
he dreaded no other trials, for life could bring no s
misery, and death no such suffering. There was
anger in his face or in his heart; nothing but a d
sadness, and a great compassion. The tears w
rolling slowly down her sunken cheeks. She took
hand within her own, and he did not withdraw
Twice he made an ineffectual attempt to speak; at
he said, "Heaven bless thee, my child! Thou hast l
lost, but found again. If thy sin is great, G
mercy is greater still." She raised her hand to
brow, and, as she had done in her delirium, felt
xiously for the ribbon round her neck. Her eye
on her finger, on which Edmund had placed
wedding-ring. A faint colour rose in her cheek.
beckoned to Father Francesco to come closer to
and then whispered to him, "I have greatly sinn
but not as you think. Father! I am marr
and I am dying because I would not abandon
faith."

Tears of gratitude sprang into Father Frances
eyes, as he raised them to Heaven; and he answ
solemnly, "It is enough, my child; I believe it.

if man has deceived thee, my Ginevra, God will receive thee."

She fell back on the pillow with his hand still locked in her's, and a few moments of silence followed, for she was too weak to speak much at a time. He gazed on her pale face — he grasped her feeble hand, and blessed God in his heart. What cared he now if the world despised her — if her earthly father rejected her, now that from her lips he had heard those words of comfort.

Though the spring of her young life was broken, and she was going down to the grave in the morning of her days; though the flower which had blossomed by his side in his old age had, like the prophet's gourd, withered in a night, and perished before the aged tree, which had once sheltered it, Heaven was opening to receive her; his own long pilgrimage was drawing to a close, and both were advancing towards the land where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest. When Ginevra roused herself again, she informed him, at intervals, of the circumstances of her history, and he gathered from these *broken sentences* some idea of the situation she was

placed in, but not enough to enlighten him as to its precise nature. He strongly suspected that her innocence had been practised upon, and it was with difficulty that the aged priest could look forward with calmness to an interview with the man who had deceived and betrayed her whom he had left pure, bright, and happy, and whom he had found again dying and dishonoured. To remove her from that house would have been his ardent desire; but as that was impossible, he resolved to remain by her side, to watch over her to the last, to support her through the valley of the shadow of death by all the sacred aids which religion affords, to resign her to none but God, and then depart, and finish his own appointed course, without one earthly care or joy to cast a cloud or a ray over its remaining days.

As the night advanced Ginevra grew rapidly worse, but at the same time her mind seemed to become clearer, and her memory more accurate. The doctor came again, and looked anxiously at his watch, as if calculating the probable time of Edmund's return. He spoke in a low voice to Mrs. Atkinson, and gave some directions about his patient. If any further change *took place*, he was to be instantly sent for; he recom-

mended that she should accomplish her religious duties at once, as she might at any moment now relapse into unconsciousness.

* * * * *

The holy rites had been performed. To him who had received her first confession, Ginevra had made her last, and never had the pardoning words descended into her heart with a more sacred power than in that hour when life was receding and eternity approaching. The last blessed sacrament had been received, and extreme unction administered to her — the soul was strengthened for its last struggle, and the light of another world had dawned upon her sight. For a moment her strength seemed to return; she held out her hand to the priest, and beckoned to him to sit down by her side. He came, and she bowed her head while he fervently blessed her; then raising it again, she fixed her eyes upon him, and spoke in a low but distinct voice —

"Father, I am about to die. I feel it — I know it. And never have I thanked God for an earthly blessing as I thank him for this. But one prayer I *have to make to* you; and if you love me, as I know

you love me," she added, as the old man's tears flowed down his withered cheeks, "you will hear it — you will grant it. I am married! Father, I am married! and Edmund Neville is my husband. I have seen him here, at the foot of my bed, at my side. His arm has been round me. I have felt his kisses on my cheek, and his tears on my brow. He will return — he will come again to the side of this bed *once;* I know not when — this night, or to-morrow, or later still; but I know he will come to look on what he once loved, — to ask the cold lips to pardon him, the *dead* to forgive him, — and there will be none to say, 'She blessed you — she prayed for you — she loved you to the last.' Father! *you* must be there when he comes. *You* must bless him. Will you, Father? Do not turn away —"

"I will pray for him, my child;" answered the priest in a broken voice.

"Oh! but you must bless him, Father — you must promise to bless him, or I cannot die in peace! Tell him I never loved any one but him. He thought I *had disobeyed* him once — I never did. Tell him so, *and ask him* to keep this." She drew from her finger

the little ring her tears had so often washed. "It has been near my heart ever since we married. I have never told anybody but you that we were married. I do not know why I am here. I think I went out of my mind, and was brought to this place. Comfort my father and my sister. Tell them how I loved them, but do not tell them I was married — unless you ought — unless you must — my head feels weak and confused! — but if they love me, let them be kind to Edmund. Let me speak to you, Father; do not bid me rest — I shall rest soon, but now hear me. By your prayers — by your tears — by the memory of her he once fondly loved — by all the sufferings I have endured — by the deep, deep faith with which I die — win him to penitence, to hope, to truth. Deal gently with him; and if the day should come when he sees the truth as I see it, as we see it, dear Father, — tell him that in this my dying hour, I foresaw it, and was glad."

An expression of joy passed over Ginevra's face as she uttered these last words. She fixed her eyes upwards with a steady gaze, which lasted a few minutes, and then she relapsed into unconsciousness, and the *doctor was hastily* summoned.

Two hours later, when Father Francesco, who had hurried for a few minutes to his own home, was entering the front room, he found a lady in deep mourning established there, whose countenance and attitude betokened an extreme interest and anxiety. She rose at his approach, and glancing at his dress, said, in a manner at once quiet and respectful —

"May I ask, Sir, if you are the priest who has been attending on — on my brother's wife?"

He looked steadily and keenly at her, and in a tone which thrilled through Mrs. Neville's heart as if she had been herself the guilty person inquired after. responded —

"I am, Madam. Where is your brother?"

"There," she said, pointing to the next room; and unable to restrain her tears — "there, watching in despair over her unconscious form — an hour sooner, and he might have received her forgiveness."

"She *has* forgiven him," he answered gently. "The last words she uttered were to invoke a blessing on his head."

"Thank God for that! Thank God for it!" Mrs. Neville ejaculated in a hurried manner. "If any one

could tell him! I dare not go near them;" — she trembled as she spoke — "there is something awful in such grief as his. He is almost out of his mind — but if he knew that she had prayed for him. Can *you* go in?" she asked in a nervous manner. "Could you speak to him?"

Father Francesco approached the bed near which Edmund was kneeling, and gently touched his shoulder, but almost started back at the haggard expression of his face, as for an instant he turned it towards him.

"Leave me," he said in a whisper. "Leave us. You can do nothing here. You were with her in her hours of consciousness. You brought her the consolations you could give. There are none for her destroyer. I have nothing left me but these last moments, in which I can hold her in my arms — do not disturb us. You do not know what grief is — you may have seen it, but you never felt it, or you could not see that angel dying, and remain calm. But I forget — *you* have not killed her!"

He bent over her, and looked into her face, as if, by the intensity of that gaze, he could detain the life

that was ebbing. He drew her head on his bosom, and spoke not another word; the priest was kneeling at the foot of the bed; after a while Anne Neville glided in, and knelt there also, and both prayed in silence. Thus the hours went by, and the night advanced; the nurse went and came, and the doctor stood near the bed; Edmund stirred not — the least movement might have disturbed her; he would have wished to still the beating of his heart; her breathing was so faint he could not discern it. Now and then the doctor felt her pulse, and held a glass to her lips: she never moved, but a pang of speechless agony shot through his mind in those instants. Still he waited, and the hours went by, and the suspense went on, and the prayers of the priest and of his companion grew more fervent, and the light of day began to dawn. Again the doctor drew near the bed, and this time he said, "The pulse is stronger." Still Edmund stirred not; something sharper than pain had run through his frame as those words were pronounced; and through the next hour he seemed to himself to suffer more than before, for there was a change, and life and death were trembling in the balance. The sun was rising, a ray of light made its way into the room, and she moaned faintly. The doc-

tor signed to him to lay her head on the pillow, and he held something to her lips; she swallowed what he had prepared, opened her eyes once, closed them immediately, and fell asleep again. "She will recover now," the doctor whispered, and forcibly led him from the room. He would have fallen had he not been thus supported. The sudden emotions of that moment, joined to the excessive fatigue he had endured, almost overpowered him, and he nearly fainted. He had not given way to his feelings during all that long night; now he wept like a child, and then suddenly pressed his sister to his heart in a transport of joy, which she vainly endeavoured to calm.

With a gratitude as fervent, but less vehement, Father Francesco sat for a moment by the bed-side, from which all but him had withdrawn. He blessed the sleeping form of his Ginevra, and then rose to leave the place where he had suffered and prayed for so many hours. As he entered the front room, Edmund, whose face wore traces of the most violent emotion, went up to him, and said in Italian —

"Father, you prayed for her all night. I heard it — I felt it."

"I prayed more for you than for my Ginevra," answered the priest; and he added simply, but with his voice trembling as he spoke, "I was her mother's uncle, and came to this country to seek her."

"Father Francesco!" exclaimed Edmund with agitation.

"I came to seek her," repeated the old man; "and how and where have I found her?"

Edmund hid his face in his hands.

"You said she was his wife?" he added, turning to Mrs. Neville, with an expression of anxiety.

Edmund started up, seized the arm of the priest, and cried —

"She *is* my wife. Will you, will God, ever forgive me?"

Anne looked at him with eyes full of tears, and Father Francesco pressed his hand kindly; and then Edmund returned to that place at Ginevra's side, where he had suffered such misery, and which he now resumed with such gratitude.

After an interval of repose, Mrs. Neville related to Father Francesco the history of her brother, and of Ginevra, such as she had learnt it from himself during

their dreadful journey of the preceding day. Her voice shook when she adverted to the prejudices which had been the origin of all their trials; her cheeks glowed with shame, and her eyes were bent on the ground, as she spoke of the want of moral courage in the first instance, and of the criminal silence which had subsequently stained her brother's character; but when she alluded to the stern uncompromising Protestantism of her family, and to the upright character of him who had unconsciously inflicted upon others such fearful sufferings, her eyes were raised again, and her voice grew firm. She saw the fatal result of long-standing prejudices and hereditary hatreds, and deeply lamented them; but she did not blush for one whose convictions had been sincere, and whose motives had been conscientious and pure. When her husband arrived, she left him to explain to Father Francesco in greater detail the situation in which Edmund was placed, and the circumstances which had brought about in so extraordinary a manner Ginevra's return to her husband, and which, after bringing her to the brink of the grave, had finally placed her in the position which she ought long ago to have occupied. He listened with a feeling of deep sympathy in her past trials, but still deeper

gratitude that she had passed through them unscathed, and won the crown promised to those who suffer for righteousness' sake. It was agreed between him and Charles Neville, that Colonel Leslie ought instantly to be informed of the events which had taken place since his departure from England, and a messenger was dispatched for that purpose with Edmund Neville's knowledge and consent.

When Ginevra awoke, after a long and refreshing sleep, her hand was in Edmund's, and on the finger of that hand was the wedding-ring which was never to leave it again.

"Am I dreaming?" she whispered, and passing her arm round his neck, she drew him close to herself. "If I am, do not wake me."

He kissed her again without speaking. The nurse passed through the room, and stood a moment near the bed.

"Are you not afraid?" Ginevra whispered, as he still held her hand, and pressed it to his lips.

"Afraid of nothing but your not forgiving me, my wife," he answered.

"O, Edmund!" she cried, and threw her arms

round his neck; then, pushing him back a little, she looked into his face with an anxious expression; but still clinging to him, as if she feared to let him go, she whispered, "Edmund, are you ruined?"

"Ruined in fortune, rich in happiness, my treasure!" he replied; and she read in his eyes the truth of what he said. "Ginevra, dearest, you will have to plead for me with your father. Father Francesco has forgiven me, and he knows all."

"It is not a dream, then; you speak of my father; you have seen my uncle; you do not start and hurry away when others come near us, Edmund. I was so glad to die, and now —" a faint smile passed over her wan features; she fixed her eyes on his, and murmured, "now I am glad to live."

He clasped her again to his heart; their tears flowed in silence; his caresses, and his murmured blessings, seemed to recall her trembling spirit from the confines of death to the visions of life.

It was with difficulty that, later in the day, Mrs. Neville drew her brother from Ginevra's room, and persuaded him to walk with her for awhile in the fields behind the house where they were staying. It was a

calm and lovely evening, and as Edmund Neville raised towards heaven that upward glance, the highest thanksgiving that man can offer to his Creator, he had never before felt so deeply the influence of the silence of nature at her sunset hour. His spirit was wearied with the vicissitudes of fear and hope, of grief and joy, and calmer feelings were beginning to spring up in his heart. His sister and himself wandered along a shady path which lay at the back of the meadow they had crossed, and at the edge of this field they found the trunks of some trees which had been cut down on that spot, and there they sat down to rest. Neither of them at first seemed able to exchange more than a few words, and those were such as had no reference to the past or the future. Both glanced often at the window of Ginevra's room; the subject seemed almost too painful or too sacred for conversation; but Edmund felt that they must not allow any sort of reserve to rise up again between them, and that the sooner they spoke openly and calmly of their relative positions, the better it would be for the future peace of mind and comfort of both. He therefore made an effort over himself, and said, without looking at her —

"Anne, you will not be a hard creditor, I know; and you will even lend me, I am sure, a sum of money with which to begin life again?"

"Is it not too soon to speak of this?" she said, with some agitation.

"No," he replied, more calmly and earnestly, "it is better, from the first, to look everything in the face. My future destiny must partly depend on Ginevra's decision, and on the wishes of her family. I know she will never forsake me; but I will not condemn her to a long banishment, if they can point out any means by which I can honourably maintain her in England or in Italy; but my own wish would be to obtain some employment in America, or to try my fortune as an emigrant in Ceylon or in Australia. I should see my way clearly," he continued, "if it were not for my debts. They are *immense*, but with the assistance I know you will give me, and my own unceasing exertions, I may yet succeed in making my way to independence."

A deep sigh escaped him, and Anne's heart sank within her; she was afraid that selfish regrets had arisen

again, and she trembled for him and his new-born virtues; but she was mistaken, and she felt she was, when, after a short pause, he added —

"It is only on her account that I feel anxiety about the future. I have much to expiate; and, bound as she is to me by sacred ties, and by a love which has survived what would have destroyed a common attachment, she may, alas! have much to suffer yet through me and with me; but I cannot, even in that view of the subject, give way to any repinings. I *know her*, for I have tried her, and in the boundless devotion of my whole heart and life, in the new convictions, the new feelings, which have gradually been taking possession of my mind, and which the sufferings of the last few days have, I trust, rivetted with indelible strength, there will be enough, I believe, as firmly as I believe in her truth and virtue, to console her for sharing the fortunes of a ruined, guilty, but deeply repentant husband."

He stopped, and fixed his eyes on the window of Ginevra's room, with an expression which affected his sister. In a few seconds, and with a voice of much emotion, she said —

"I am glad that you have said all this to me, Edmund. Very glad I am that I did not interrupt you. The sentiments and the resolutions which you have just expressed, will be, in future years, a source of satisfaction both to yourself and to me. That you neither thought nor spoke with bitterness on this day; that no selfish or angry feelings have mingled with your thanksgivings for the great blessing which has been granted you, will be remembered by us both as long as we live, and may justly tend to reconcile you with yourself, and renew all the love I felt for you before these miserable trials estranged us from each other. And now, Edmund, listen to me, for I have that to say to you which, in justice to yourself, I withheld till this moment. *One* who may have been misled, but whose intentions towards you were ever kind and just —"

"O Anne, could I have forgiven him, if *she* had died? Now I do from the bottom of my heart."

Anne coloured, and said, with something of indignation in her voice, "It was his reliance in your truth that misled him. He never would believe that his son was capable of deceiving him."

"I know, Anne, that *he* meant well, and that *I* have acted wickedly," Edmund interrupted. "God knows, I have forgiven the injury he has done me! for, do I not myself need the amplest measure of forgiveness?"

Anne continued: "A few days before his death, an anonymous letter was brought to him, which purported to inform him of your secret marriage with Ginevra Leslie."

"It must have been from that wretched Carafelli," exclaimed Edmund. "He alone could have sent it, for he alone knew of my marriage."

"He showed it to none but me," she resumed, "and absolutely refused to believe in the fact. He was certain (he over and over again repeated) that you would never have so deceived him, and it was only a few hours before his death, at my most urgent entreaties, and to satisfy what he considered my unreasonable fears, that he had a codicil secretly drawn up, which, in a certain contingency, (I am now about to explain to you,) rescinded his testamentary sentence of disinheritance. He placed it in my hands, and bound me

by a solemn promise never to speak of, or produce it, unless it should hereafter appear that you had already married a Catholic before your return to England, and therefore before the menace which, almost in his last moments, he had announced to you. This he commanded me to use every means in my power secretly to ascertain; for then, and then only, was the prohibitory clause of his will to become void and of no effect. He would have prevented your marriage with a Catholic, at the expense of his life, of his own happiness, and, perhaps, of your's; but deep as was his abhorrence of that creed, he never thought of separating what God had united, and his last act was no impious opposition of his own will to that of Heaven. Now, judge between him and you, and forgive me, if my words have seemed to you stern or cold. Such is not my love for you. Speak to me, brother."

"Anne," said Edmund, at last, as he raised his pale face from between his hands, "I feel now what is meant by heaping coals of fire on an offender's head. *I*, who accused, insulted, and defrauded *you*. Sister, I can scarcely understand or believe what you tell me." Tears came to his relief, for the violence of his emo-

tion was choking him. After a pause, he took her hand in his, and said in a low voice, "Now, I understand why you and Charles watched me so narrowly. Sister, sister, you may forgive me, but I cannot forgive myself."

He did his sister justice. No common words of thanks passed his lips in that hour, or in any other; but there was that in his heart which no language could have expressed, but which was, nevertheless, conveyed to her's, as if they had been able to read into each other's minds. Her disinterestedness was complete; she looked for no gratitude, and expected no praise; but she had her reward even on earth, in the consciousness that she had not lived in vain — that she had screened her father's memory from reproach and obloquy — that she had secured her brother's peace and comfort, and preserved his reputation. This, with the tender affection he showed her, was her earthly recompense, and in Heaven she might, one day, hope to receive the blessing promised to those who seek peace, and ensue it. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

With gratitude and with wonder Ginevra learnt the conclusion of their eventful history; but, above all, she rejoiced that Edmund had pressed her to his heart, and called her his wife, before his sister had revealed to him the secret in her possession. He had spoken words that morning which lingered in her ears like a strain of sweet music; words more precious to her than all the codicils, the deeds, and the rent-rolls in the world. In the sanctuary of her heart they remained enshrined, and formed a soothing refuge for memory when too deeply tried by the remembrance of the past.

It was not till many days had elasped that Edmund was permitted by the physicians to remove his wife from the house where they both had so much suffered. Darrell Court was prepared for their reception, and they proceeded there as soon as letters from abroad had informed them that it was at Grantley Manor, and not in London, that Colonel Leslie wished to meet his daughter. Father Francesco accompanied them to their home, and as he stood by Ginevra on the day of their arrival, and saw her smile as she gazed on its beauty, from the couch on which her husband

had placed her, he whispered to her in Italian, "Sorrow endureth for a night; but joy cometh in the morning."

She pressed his hand in silence, and a tear rolled down her cheek. When, a few days later, he took leave of her, on the eve of his departure for Italy, she begged him to return in the spring, before the acacia blossoms of the Casa Masani should have put forth their snowy wreaths; but when he answered gravely, "The words of St. Simeon suit me now, my daughter: 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,' is the only request I have to make," a shade of sadness stole over her face; but when, in another instant, she turned it towards him, there was nothing but peace and joy in its expression, and she said in a low voice: "Father, I feel that we shall soon meet again."

He blessed her, and went on his way, rejoicing that his earthly pilgrimage was drawing to a close, and that a light had been shed on its remaining days, dispersing the clouds which had for a moment so darkly hung over them. The pilgrim's prayer was on his lips,

the pilgrim's spirit in his heart, and, before long, the pilgrim's home was his; and when the spring returned, the acacia trees hung their snowy wreaths over the sod where Father Francesco was laid.

CONCLUSION.

THE bells of the parish church were ringing a merry peal, as a travelling carriage drove up the avenue of Grantley Manor, and a group of eager faces were gathered together at the hall-door, where it stopped, to welcome its inmates. Mr. Thornton was there with his gold-headed cane, his extended hand, and his ready smile: his wife was describing what they all felt, till the moment when the door of the carriage was opened, and then she felt too much to describe anything. While Mr. Sydney groaned at the lateness of the hour, and shrugged his shoulders at the innumerable trunks he caught sight of, Mrs. Sydney had retreated into the house, and, pale and breathless, was leaning against the hall window, scarcely able to endure the agitation of that moment. Margaret was in her arms even before her own Walter; and the tone with which she whispered, as she clung round her neck, "Wish me joy, dearest mother! I love him, and he loves me more than ever;

and everybody knows it now," gave her one of those rare sensations of joy, which do not often occur in a person's life, for which they feel grateful all the days that they live, and which fill their hearts with a strange surprise and a still stranger happiness. O hope and fear! and joy and sorrow! ye are deep and fearful workers in the human soul; and when ye act on a mother's spirit, ye are terrible in your strength, and wonderful in your power!

"Mrs. Sydney," said Colonel Leslie, as he sat down by her a few moments later, "you have heard, I suppose, that Walter takes charge of the girl whom he spoilt long ago, and that I lose her now, when he can scarcely prize her more than I do."

These were the first words of praise and of affection which Margaret had heard from her father's lips, and the deep flush of joy with which she received, showed how deeply she felt them. After kissing her dear Mrs. Dalton, and shaking hands with the old servants in the house, she called Walter to her side, and stood with him on the balcony of the drawing-room, gazing on the stately beeches, the rapid river,

and the distant muirs of her own home. There had been rain in the morning; the shrubs were still dripping with the plentiful showers; the dahlias and geraniums showed their washed faces, bright and shining, like those of children fresh from their morning ablutions; the horse-chestnuts were shedding their polished fruit on the ground, and the birds were singing their last song—that busy, low twitter among the high branches, which is soon hushed into silence as the shades of night close in. Margaret, absorbed in the beauty of the scene, had been silent for a few minutes, but now she grasped Walter's arm, and pointing to the avenue, she said abruptly — "Here they are!" and reached the entrance-steps as soon as the carriage she had seen. In a moment her sister was in her arms, and each felt, as she clasped the other to her breast, the full tide of sweet and bitter memories, which the place, the hour, the mute embrace, was bringing to their minds.

It was with a strange mixture of feelings that Colonel Leslie received his child and her husband. He folded her to his heart with a painful tenderness and a stern emotion. He had loved her too passionately to

be able to look back with calmness to the past; letters had passed between him and Neville; pardon had been asked on the one hand with a frank humility, and granted on the other with a cold reserve. Colonel Leslie's brow darkened, and his voice shook each time that he spoke to his daughter's husband. It was difficult to him to forgive — impossible to forget; but his child was happy, and she loved her husband. By degrees it grew easier to forgive, but still he could not forget; the wound had been too deep, the suffering too recent. It was not till some time afterwards, when Ginevra led him to a spot near Darrell Court, where the first stone of a Catholic chapel was laid, and he read the inscription it bore: "In memorial of an eternal repentance and an eternal gratitude," that his feelings softened towards Edmund Neville. If he could have read into his heart, he would have seen there more of love and of suffering than that memorial stone could record. Margaret and Ginevra were standing once more on the stone terrace of Grantley Manor; their eyes were fixed on each other, their hands were clasped together, and a long and silent kiss was now and then exchanged between them. They

gazed on the distant woods of Darrell Court, on the turrets of Heron Castle, and then turned to one another with a sigh or a smile, for their hearts were too full for speech. The troubles, the trials, the mysteries of their lives had passed away, even as a tale that is told; their lot seemed cast in pleasant places, and theirs was a goodly heritage, as far as human foresight could decide. In both their hearts was a trembling sense of gratitude for the perils they had escaped, for the haven they had reached; and if Ginevra looked less to this life and more to another — if her hopes and joys were of a more exalted nature, and her aspirations of a higher order than those of her sister, was it strange that it should be so? Had not life shown her depths of misery which inexperience cannot fathom? Had not her spirit hovered on the confines of eternity, and almost taken its wing for the mansions of heaven? She returned to life — to its duties and its blessings; no smile was sweeter than her's, no serenity deeper, and no tenderness more touching; but a seal had been set on her brow, which nothing could efface. Death had been near her, and had left a message for her soul, aud the melodies of earth could

not overpower that whisper. This was Edmund Neville's trial in the midst of happiness. He ever felt as if an angel was lingering at his side, — as if the links that bound her to life were slender as the threads of the gossamer, — as if she had only been restored to him for a while, to save him from despair and to teach him to repent.

In the old chambers and tapestried halls of Heron Castle, Margaret was like a bright ray of sunshine, gladdening all it touched. She was more idolised than ever by Walter and his parents; she was the pride and the joy of their hearts; the happiest of wives, she soon became the happiest of mothers. A year or two later, at the same window where, in her childish glee. she had so often disturbed Walter from his books, she held a blooming, laughing boy, whose face was as bright and joyous as her own. To a summer morning and to a moonlight night the sisters were once compared. The summer morning is turning to a glorious noon, the moonlight night is waxing brighter each year, but with an unearthly light. Fond hearts watch them — a deep love attends them. They are exemplary in their lives, and united in their affections. But life

may, ere long, bring forth fresh storms: let us take leave of them, then, while smiles are on their lips, and joy is in their hearts. Let us wish them prosperity, and bid them farewell.

"May their ways be the ways of pleasantness, and all their paths be peace!"

THE END.

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